

国際演劇年鑑 2022 *Theatre*
Yearbook
2022

Theatre in Japan

日本の舞台芸術を知る

NOH and KYOGEN – KABUKI – BUNRAKU – MUSICALS – CONTEMPORARY
THEATRE – CHILDREN'S and YOUTH THEATRE – JAPANESE CLASSICAL
DANCE – BALLET – CONTEMPORARY DANCE and BUTOH – TELEVISION DRAMAS

公益社団法人 国際演劇協会日本センター
ITI / UNESCO

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Theatre Yearbook 2022 Theatre in Japan

Published in March 2022

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Foreword

The Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute is a public interest incorporated foundation and belongs to the international network of National Centres and professional organizations in approximately ninety countries and regions that constitutes the International Theatre Institute (ITI), which is a non-governmental organization under the umbrella of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The preamble of the UNESCO Constitution begins with the famous phrase “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.” Article 3 of the standing rules of the Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute stipulates that the purpose of the Centre is “to contribute to the development of culture and realization of peace in Japan by deepening mutual understanding and facilitating the creation and exchange of theatre and dance based upon the purpose of the UNESCO Constitution.”

The COVID-19 pandemic that first swept the world two years ago continues to wreak havoc on people’s lives. Beset like everyone else by uncertainty about the future and restrictions on movement, people in the theatre world are engaged in a process of trial and error. New endeavors such as streaming and performances for small audiences have highlighted even more clearly the essential nature of the performing arts as an art form in which people share both time and space. Even in the era of living with COVID, the role of the performing arts in examining humanity and society from multifaceted perspectives seems likely to remain unchanged.

The Japanese Centre has published the *Theatre Yearbook* since 1972. Starting from 1997, it has been published in two parts: “Theatre in Japan” (English version) for readers outside Japan and “Theatre Abroad” (Japanese version) for domestic readers. Since 2011, the Centre has been commissioned to publish this yearbook by the Agency for Cultural Affairs as part of the “Program for Nurturing Upcoming Artists Leading the Next Generation.”

Also funded by this program, we have staged readings every year since 2009 to introduce remarkable plays from around the world as part of our research activities to promote international theatrical exchange. In 2021, we continued the “Theatre Born in Conflict Zones” series for the thirteenth consecutive year, this time featuring a new play from the United States that was translated and introduced to Japan for the first time.

Thus the publication of the *Theatre Yearbook* has laid a firm foundation for activities that seek to gain knowledge of the relationship between Japan and the world, to deepen mutual understanding by positioning Japan within the global network, and to realize cultural development and peace.

We look forward to your continued support and cooperation with the activities of the Japanese Centre of ITI in the years to come.

March 27, 2022

In commemoration of World Theatre Day

Nagai Taeko
President

Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute

CONTENTS

005 **Shots from the Performing Arts in Japan in 2021**

The Japanese Performing Arts in 2021

- 038 **Noh and Kyogen** Oda Sachiko
046 **Kabuki** Yanai Kenji
052 **Bunraku** Kameoka Noriko
059 **Musicals** Hagio Hitomi
066 **Contemporary Theatre** Yamaguchi Hiroko
074 **Children's and Youth Theatre** Ota Akira
081 **Japanese Classical Dance** Hirano Hidetoshi
090 **Ballet** Urawa Makoto
097 **Contemporary Dance and Butoh** Tsutsumi Hiroshi
106 **Television Dramas** Okamuro Minako

Developments in Japan and Overseas in 2021

- 114 At Our Posts, Ten Years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami /
Kuramochi Hiroyuki, Onobu Pelican, Shibahara Hiroshi, Hatasawa Seigo
127 The 160th Anniversary of Mori Ogai's Birth and the Centenary of His Death
—Ogai and the Performing Arts / Itoda Soichiro
136 The 2.5-Dimensional Musical: An Audience-Creating System / Suzuki Kunio

Special Feature

- 145 "Theatre Born in Conflict Zones 13" Five Highly Dense Short Films / Tanioka Takehiko
156 Companion Volume "Theatre Abroad 2022" in Japanese
158 ITI Centres

«Editors' Notes»

- The articles in this publication report on the performing arts in Japan from the previous calendar year.
- Names are presented in the respective style of their country/region of origin. For Japanese names, the order is family name, followed by given name. The names in the contributor profiles are presented with a comma and in the following order (except for individuals with only one name): family name, given name.
- Titles for traditional Japanese performing arts (Noh, kyogen, kabuki, bunraku, Japanese classical dance, etc.) are presented in the following order: *Japanese title (English Title)*.
- Other titles of works are presented in the following order: *English Title (Japanese title)*.
- The English play titles, theatre venue names, and other formal names are the official ones or, when no official English name is available, newly translated for this publication.

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**Shots from the Performing Arts in Japan
in 2021**

Noh and Kyogen



National Noh Theatre Special Programme of Kyogen Performance *Semi (The Locust)*
Nomura Matasaburo as the ghost of a locust and Noguchi Takayuki as the Traveling Priest Photo provided by the National Noh Theatre



National Noh Theatre Regular Performance *Kagekiyo* Asami Masakuni as Kagekiyo and Asai Fumiyoshi as the chorus leader
Photo provided by the National Noh Theatre



National Noh Theatre Regular Performance *Hotoke no Hara (Buddha's Field)* Katayama Kuroemon as Hotoke Gozen (L), Fukuo Tomotaka as the Traveling Priest (R), and Asai Fumiyo as the chorus leader Photo provided by the National Noh Theatre



Shiotsu Noh no Kai *Obasute (The Abandoned Crone)* Shiotsu Akio Photo: Mikami Fuminori

Noh and Kyogen



National Noh Theatre Special Programme of
Kyogen Performance
Koshi Inori (Lower-Back Prayers) Miyake Ukon
Photo provided by the National Noh Theatre

The Sixth Revival Noh Trial Performance ***Takamura***
Mikata Shizuka as Takamura (L),
Hosho Kinya as the Priest who visits the ex-Emperor (C), and
Katayama Kuroemon as the ex-Emperor Go-Toba (R)
© Nohgaku Performers' Association





Tessenkai **Nagasaki no Seibo** (*Our Lady of Nagasaki*) Shimizu Kanji Photo: Miyauchi Katsu



Setagaya Art Museum Performance Series Trance/Entrance **Anatomy of the Dream: Shojo-Midare** Nagayama Keizo
Photo: Imai Tomoki

Kabuki



Sakurahime azuma bunsho (*The Scarlet Princess of Edo*)

Kataoka Nizaemon as Tsurigane Gonsuke (L) and
Bando Tamasaburo as Sakurahime (R) ©Shochiku



Sanmon gosan no kiri (*The Temple Gate and the Paulownia Crest*)

Nakamura Kichiemon as Ishikawa Goemon ©Shochiku

Kotobuki Soga no taimen
(The Felicitous Soga Encounter)

Onoe Kikugoro as Kudo Suketsune © Shochiku



li tairo (Lord li)

Matsumoto Hakuo as li Naosuke (R) and
Nakamura Kaishun as Oshizu no Kata (L)
© Shochiku



Kabuki



Kagamijishi (The Lion Dance)
Onoe Kikunosuke as Yayoi © Shochiku



*Kotobuki Soga no taimen
(The Felicitous Soga Encounter)*
Bando Minosuke as Soga no Goro © Shochiku

Bunraku



Kokusenya Kassen (The Battles of Coxinga) Yoshida Minosuke manipulating Kinshojo
Photo provided by the National Bunraku Theatre



Kiritake Kanjuro speaks during a press conference on July 16 as he is made a living national treasure
Photo provided by *Sankei Shimbun*



Toyotake Sakitayu speaks during a press conference on Oct 26 as he is awarded Person of Cultural Merit
Photo provided by *Sankei Shimbun*



Meiboku Sendai hagi – Goten no dan
(The Precious Incense and Autumn Flowers of Sendai – Palace Scene)
Tsuruzawa Seiji Photo provided by the National Theatre

Bunraku



ROHM Theatre Kyoto
Tsume moyo yumeji no kadomatsu
(*Kadomatsu's Dream*)
Photo: Katsura Hideya



Bunraku Dreams: A Tale of Succession
Gojobashi (Gojobashi Bridge)
Yoshida Tamao manipulating Ushiwakamaru (R) and
Yoshida Tamamichi manipulating Benkei (L)
Photo: Katsura Hideya

Musicals



Box of Spirits and Goblins Musical Company It's Follies Photo: Iwata Eri



Frozen The Shiki Theatre Company Photo: Abe Akihito ©Disney

Musicals



Newsies Toho Co., Ltd./TBS Photo provided by Toho Theatrical Division



Waitress Toho Co., Ltd. Photo provided by Toho Theatrical Division

Allegiance Horipro Inc.
Photo: Miyagawa Maiko,
provided by Horipro Inc.



Jamie Horipro Inc.
Photo: Tanaka Aki,
provided by Horipro Inc.



Contemporary Theatre



Fakespeare NODA MAP Photo: Shinoyama Kishin



Unfulfilled Ghost and Monster – Zaha/Tsuruga Kanagawa Arts Theatre Photo: Kono Yurika



The Air Ver. 3: And He Left Nitosha Photo: Homma Nobuhiko



Point of No Return Gekidan Chocolate Cake Photo: Ikemura Takashi

Contemporary Theatre



Jangarian Bungakuza Photo: Miyagawa Maiko



Sai-no-kuni Shakespeare Series #37 *All's Well That Ends Well* Photo: Watanabe Takahiro



Fade New National Theatre, Tokyo Photo: Hikiji Nobuhiko



The Osho Trilogy Shin Royal Taishusha and Kanagawa Arts Theatre Photo: Hosono Shinji

Contemporary Theatre



Forests Setagaya Public Theatre Photo: Hosono Shinji



The Doctor Parco Theater Photo: Miyagawa Maiko

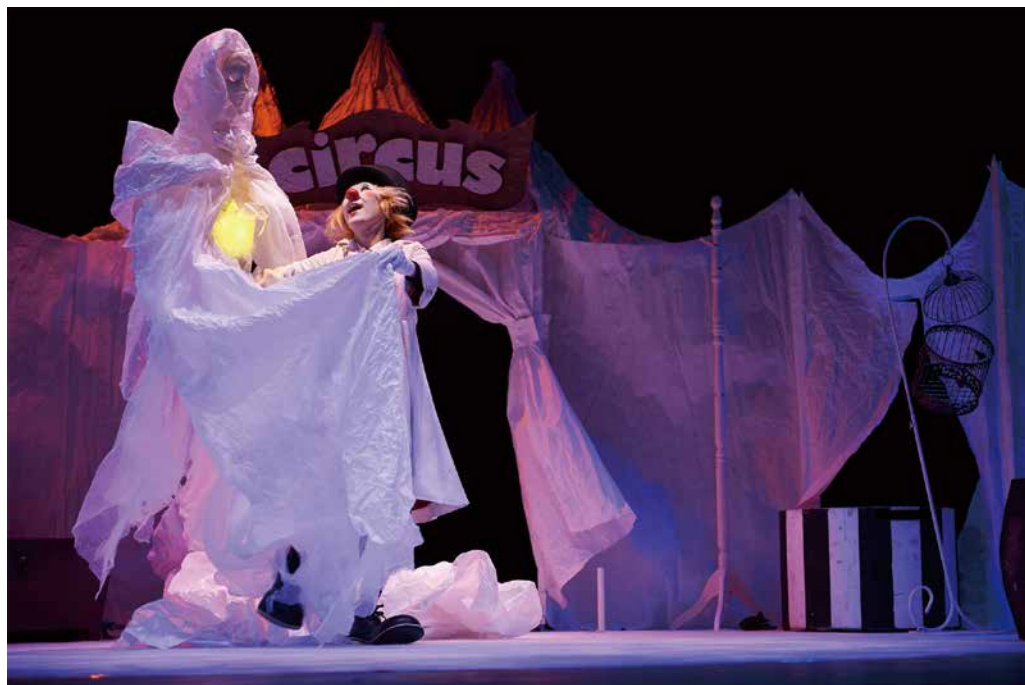
Children's and Youth Theatre

KOYO Mime Live
Pantomime Unit TORIO
Photo provided by Yamamoto Koyo



The Circus Lights

La Strada Company
Photo provided by La Strada Company



Children's and Youth Theatre



Taiko Live – Michikusa Dong Dok Tamakko-za Photo provided by ASSITEJ Japan Centre



The Forest of Lost Things Theater Genosse Photo: Uchistyle



Kakeru! Studio Eggs Photo provided by Studio Eggs



The Diary Library: Living Life as Myself Kazenoko-Kyushu Theatre Company Photo: Warokas

Japanese Classical Dance



Shue no Kai **Kato-Bushi Dojoji** (*The Ghost of a Woman in Love at Dojoji Temple to Kato-Bushi Music*) Hanayagi Shue
Photo: Mai Video



Commemorating the 55th Shusen Kai **Nagauta Urashima** Ichiyama Shosen Photo: Kotobuki Shashin



Hana Tsugu Kai in Tokyo, Fujima Kiyotsugu Buyo Recital *Futari Shizuka (The Two Shizukas)*
Fujima Kiyotsugu (R), Kagita Mayumi (L) Photo: Ichida Tomoyuki



National Theatre August Japanese Classical Dance Performance
Opening the Door to Traditional Japanese Dance – Japanese Classical Dance x Dance: The Dancing Body
Nishikawa Senyoichi (L), Kondo Ryohei (R), Ishibuchi Satoshi (C) Photo provided by the National Theatre

Japanese Classical Dance



Umewaka Kai **Shinpa Ebanzuke** (*An Illustrated Program of Shinpa*) Umewaka Kanjiro Photo: Video Photo Saito



The Fourth Performance of Japanese Classical Dance SAI **Yume Ou Ko** (*A Child Chasing Dreams*)
Photo: The Nihonbuyo Association

Ballet



Swan Lake

National Ballet of Japan
Photo: Shikama Takashi



Matsuyama Ballet commemorating
Morishita Yoko's seventy years of dancing
Photo: Hiyama Takashi © A.I Co., Ltd.

Ballet



Shinohara Seiichi's Ballet Recital

Ananke

Photo: Okamura Masao (Osaka Tes)



MIHAKASHI Tokoiriya

Photo: Nakahodo Choji



Le Corsaire Sadamatsu-Hamada Ballet Photo: Okamura Masao (Osaka Tes)



Don Quixote Matsuo Reiko Ballet Photo: Murahashi Kazuaki

Contemporary Dance and Butoh



Reflecting Fukushima Otake Eiko Photo: Nakagawa Tatsuhiko



The Dying Swan: The Truth on Its Death Sakai Hana/dir. Okada Toshiki Photo: Hatori Naoshi



Za-Koenji Dance Award II Special Version *nostalgia* Tamura Koichiro Photo: Yang Seung-woo



Under the Cherry Tree – Kasai Akira wo Odoru Kasai Akira Photo: bozzo

Contemporary Dance and Butoh



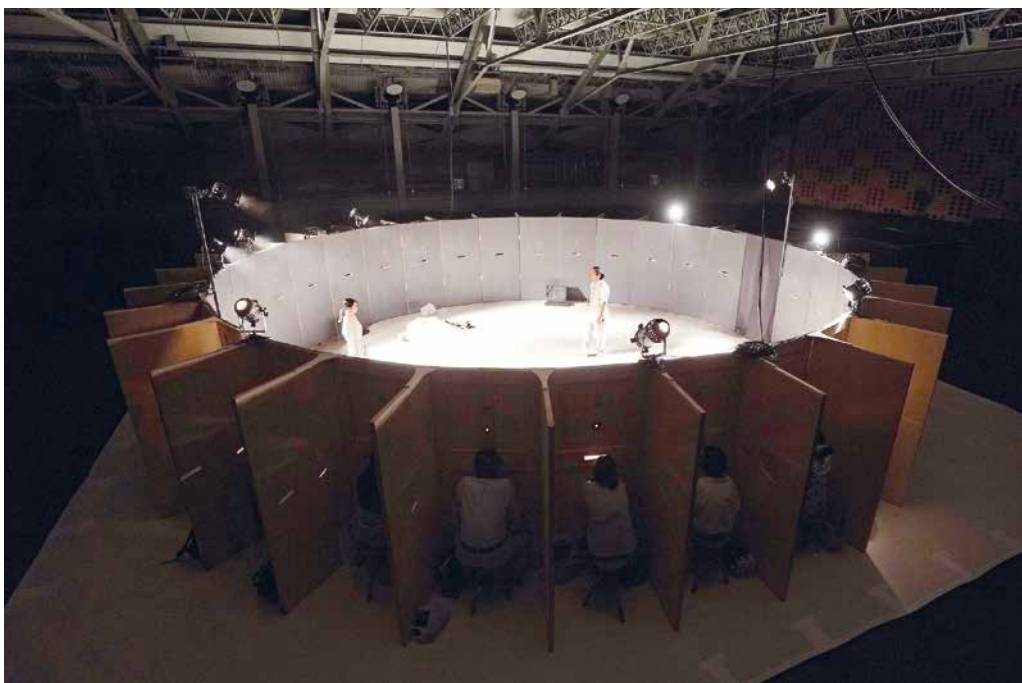
Gold Shower François Chaignaud (L), Maro Akaji (R) Photo: Kawashima Hiroyuki



Teshigawara Saburo version *Rashomon* Photo: Awane Osamu (Staff Tes)



Only the Sound Remains – Reverberation Moriyama Kaiji Photo: Iida Koji, provided by Tokyo Bunka Kaikan



Peeping Garden/re:creation Moonlight Mobile Theater (Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse No. 1) Photo: Daido Hiroyasu

Contemporary Dance and Butoh



The Rite of Spring Noism0+Noism1+Noism2/dir. Kanamori Jo Photo: Shinoyama Kishin



Condors Production in Saitama 2021 *Free as a Bird* Photo: Haru

舞臺芸術の
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**The Japanese Performing Arts
in 2021**

Noh and Kyogen

With a Focus on the Theatricality of Utai

Oda Sachiko

Regaining Calm for Noh Performances and the Deaths of Leading Performers

The noh and kyogen world in 2021 experienced a period of instability after a state of emergency was issued on January 8th, and after the same declaration was extended again in July until September 30th when it was lifted. With these repeated emergency declarations followed by their cancellations or extensions, performances too were cancelled or postponed, and this included cancellations and postponements of performances which had been rescheduled from last year.

038

There were also instances where start times were advanced or performances shortened in order to end by 8pm, or suddenly adding tickets at a 50% admission rate due to the removal of restrictions, all of which kept organizers busy just keeping up with the changes in regulations. Even so, the total number of cancellations and postponements decreased significantly from the previous year (the National Noh Theatre, for example, only canceled two of their sponsored performances: on April 29th and May 8th), and although there were some performances where the onstage chorus was masked, from what this writer observed, there were no instances of sudden production changes necessary to prevent the spread of infection. After the 50% audience quota for performances was lifted, audience numbers increased: thereafter for the National Noh Theatre, the number of attendees always exceeded 90% of the seats available. Although the damage caused since last year by the decline in the number of performances and the number of permitted spectators cannot be eliminated entirely, as of mid-December, the world of noh itself has regained its composure. And fortunately, throughout the year, there were many ambitious and high-quality performances.

Major news of the year were the deaths of three leading performers. Asami

Masakuni (1941–2021), *shite* (main role) actor of the Kanze school died on July 13th; Nomura Shiro (1936–2021), Kanze school *shite* actor and Living National Treasure who only in April had been conferred (due to his meritorious contributions) with the special Kanze school name “Gensetsu,” died on August 21st; and Kakiyama Takashi (1940–2021), Takayasu school *otsuzumi* drummer and Living National Treasure, died on November 17th. Masakuni’s brilliant acting style constantly challenged new directions in performance; Gensetsu crossed genres with a wide range of expertise combining both grace and softness; and Takashi could change the world with the first drum stroke of the entrance music for the appearance of a *shite*; each actively performed up until just before his death and had literally been a driving force behind the modern noh world. For that reason, the feeling of loss is strong and the sense of generational change is unavoidable, but many of their most notable performances are without doubt profoundly engraved in the hearts and minds of audience members, and the younger generation of performers who directly or indirectly received their guidance will above all capably carry on those teachings into the future.

Asami Masakuni’s *Kagekiyo*

This author’s “top performance of the year” is the noh *Kagekiyo* (March 19th, National Noh Theater’s *Teirei Koen* “regular performance”), which was Masakuni’s final performance before he died. The performance of the *shite* was of course extraordinary, but the chorus (*jigashira* (chorus leader): Asai Fumiyo) particularly showed exceptional ability. First, I will outline the play.

After the fall of the Heike, the Heike samurai, Akushichibyo Kagekiyo, was exiled to Hyuga Province, and became a blind beggar known as the Hyuga exile whose life was as ephemeral as the dew. There, his daughter Hitomaru (*tsure*: accompanying *shite* role), who had been abandoned when a child, comes to visit him from Kamakura. Kagekiyo at first pretends not to recognize her, but a local villager arranges for them to meet. Kagekiyo relates the heroic battle of Yashima, then asks his daughter to pray for him and returns her to Kamakura.

Building on the rich legend of *Kagekiyo*, the drama focuses on the chance encounter of the *shite* *Kagekiyo* with his daughter, where he recalls the glory of

the past while enduring his current wretched state. A daughter, who did not have a past with her father and who had wondered “what she could do being just a girl,” longs for and visits a father whom she had never met. Kagekiyo is shaken by the feeling of regret for a past where he had broken the bonds of a family’s affection in order to pursue military prowess. Masakuni expressed Kagekiyo’s encounter with his daughter with a precision which consciously illuminated Kagekiyo’s emotions from beginning to end. For example, in the face-to-face scene, with the chorus he expresses “how truly sad it is to not wish to be visited even by my own child,” as he gradually moves his hand upwards on her shoulder and he himself sinks to the floor. Instead of performing the typical *shiori* (crying) movement pattern, he expressed his regret and affection with his whole body. Thus, instead of emphasizing his military prowess in the “battle narration,” Masakuni’s *Kagekiyo* emphasized “the inner emotion brought about by the unexpected visit of his daughter,” which was an exceptionally modern interpretation of a father and daughter’s relationship.

Asai Fumiyoshi’s Chorus

Along with Masakuni, the creation of *Kagekiyo* into the highest dramatic expression of a modern noh was due to the chorus leadership (*jigashira*) of Asai Fumiyoshi. Although noh is structured in such a way that the chorus is mainly responsible for expressing the emotions of the *shite*, the *shite* was able to perform as he wanted because he had full confidence in the chorus.

Asai, who is based in Osaka, has long been highly regarded as a chorus leader, yet his work this year was particularly impressive, having been the chorus leader for more than 15 important and/or difficult pieces. His appeal lies in his clear theatrical understanding and precise treatment of language. It reached perfection in the final scene of the noh *Hotoke no Hara (Buddha’s Field)* (National Noh Theatre, October 6th *Teirei Koen*. *Shite*: Katayama Kuroemon), with the expressive chant of “Nothing more than wind-blown clouds and water, floating waves in the heavens, originating in one dew drop,” which was a hypnotic progression overwhelming the audience as the meaning of each syllable of each word was engraved on the mind of the listener while seemingly inviting him to a new

world far away, creating a religious experience that could only be expressed in this piece.

Simply put, the *shite* carries the movement, and the chorus carries the text. Asai, if anything, is more particular about the series of word-by-word meanings than the musicality of the chant, and in so doing gives substance to the words. Asai's style is not necessarily the only correct one, but I realized once again that the charm of noh, which always quietly and deeply permeates the hearts of the audience, owes much to the performance of the chorus. Asai, who studied under Kanze Hisao (1925–1978) and Kanze Tetsunojo VIII (1931–2000) – both of whom pursued the theatricality of noh by making full use of *utai* chant, plays such an important role in promoting the depth of *utai* and widely communicating its expressive power to the younger generation.

From Offence to Acceptance

As actors age and become aware of their physical decline, they face the challenge of how to manage their performances. This year, I couldn't help but recall the concept of "the flower left in the old bones" from the *Fushi Kaden* ("Flowering Spirit" – a treatise by Zeami).

Umewaka Manzaburo (1941–), who hadn't performed noh at all last year due to leg and lower back problems, performed with Nomura Shiro the *aimai* (dance duet) of the *maibayashi* (abbreviated dance performance without costume or mask) of the noh *Futari Shizuka* (*Two Shizukas*) in the Tokyo Hayashika Kyogikai Bekkai Noh (Tokyo Instrumentalists Association Special Noh) (National Noh Theater) performance on January 31st. Considering the difficulty of standing from a *seiza* (formal position of sitting directly on the floor) position, Manzaburo instead started and ended standing performing in a restrained fashion. In so doing there was a sense of stability that did not unreasonably consume his energy and still demonstrated his natural clean-cut features, and thus the dance by these two old actors was particularly gorgeous. Kanze Yoshiyuki (1935–) who at 85 years old is the head of the Kanze Kyuko Kai performance group announced that he would dance noh for the last time (*mai osame*) with the noh *Tsurukame* (*Crane and Tortoise*) on February 14th. He isn't retiring as such as he will continue to

dance *shimai* (abbreviated dance) and give lessons. On May 21st, Umewaka Minoru (1948–) performed the *shite* role for the noh *Saigyozakura* (*Saigyo's Cherry Blossoms*) with the variant *Shirabayashi* (National Noh Theatre *Teirei Koen*) without mask (*hitamen*), using a walking staff with an attached cherry branch in his right hand, and an unusual walking staff taller than his own height in the left hand. After finally circling the pillars of the *tsukurimono* (cherry tree stage prop), he headed down the bridgeway and then shockingly collapsed at the end of the bridgeway while going offstage. Knowing the power of his past performances, this unfortunate accident was particularly sad to see. His refined chorus is alive and well, and there are still ways to utilize their talents.

Yet, watching over the development, the maturing and the decline of an actor's life has a special impact when there is an overlap with the audience's own life, and through this process there is also a new sense of a piece which is expressed over time.

Finally, I wish to write about Shiotsu Akio (1945–), the Kita School *shite* actor and the state of mind he demonstrated in the noh *Obasute* (*The Abandoned Crone*) (Shiotsu Noh no Kai, October 2nd, Kita Roppeita Memorial Noh Theatre).

Shiotsu, who builds his *kamae* (posture) by seemingly filling it with power as he tightly squeezes his waist, creates a strong presence on stage by this intensifying of his body. It is difficult to forget his unrivaled performances in such plays as *Shirahige* (*White Beard*) and *Shakkyo* (*Stone Bridge*). However, Shiotsu became sick several years ago, and despite not yet returning to his best condition, he took on what is considered to be one of the most difficult pieces in noh, an old woman piece. In the first half, his *kamae* and *hakobi* (feet movement) seemed slightly unstable, but in the second half, he appeared wearing a wrinkle-free mask such as *higaki-onna* (old woman of Higaki) with a white *choken* (gossamer, loose outer robe) sprinkled with butterfly patterns and white *okuchi* (broad stiff pleated pants) as the *shite* seemed like a pure white receptor reflecting the light of the moon. With *Obasute* in recent years, there has been a tendency for the *shite* to appear with a strong sense of attachment and end with an unresolved furious passion. Shiotsu's *shite* was the opposite in creating only a faint existence of the old woman left behind showing us instead a mountain scene illuminated by the

moon. In that day's performance pamphlet, Shiotsu wrote, "I've come to think that everything I've learned over the years is nothing but harmful unless I throw it away." Perhaps the fact that the body no longer moves as one wants leads to a state of accepting everything with the entire body. The *hayashi* instrumentalists were exquisite (particularly the *taiko* stick drum player Kotera Masato was outstanding), the chorus (led by Tomoeda Akiyo and Kagawa Seiji) were reserved and thus supported Shiotsu's performance as it moved from offence and arrived at acceptance.

In *kyogen*, the three Living National Treasures (Nomura Man, Nomura Mansaku and Yamamoto Tojiro) have not shown the least bit of weakening as they continue their astounding performances. In addition, Izumi School actor Miyake Ukon (1941–) who has directed the "Sign Language *Kyogen*" project of the Japan Theatre of the Deaf (both winners of the 2021 Saika Award) showed the unique easy-going style of the grandfather (*kyogen Koshi Inori (Lower-back Prayers)*, National Noh Theatre *Kyogen Kai*, September 22nd) and others. Also, Izumi School actor Nomura Matasaburo performed the ghost of a locust which had an uncanny appeal in the *kyogen Semi (The Locust)* with a unique attention to detail in regards to mask, costume and direction (National Noh Theatre *Kyogen Kikaku Koen*, May 26th).

Below are other special topics for 2021.

*Events

- The Japan Cultural Expo Special Performance at the Kokyo Gaien National Garden "Representation of Prayer" was performed on March 12th and 14th (the 13th performance was cancelled due to rain) on a specially constructed stage at the Imperial Palace Outer Garden. As one event in the Japan Cultural Expo, various performances included those of *noh-kyogen* and *Ryukyu buyo* (Okinawan Dance) as a prayer for the peace and safety of the country.
- Performances in conjunction with the "THE NOHGAKU FESTIVAL in the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020" took place July 27-29, August 2, 3, and 27 and September 3 at the National Noh Theatre. It was sponsored by

the Nohgaku Performers' Association, Japan Nohgaku Association, Agency for Cultural Affairs, and Japan Arts Council jointly with the Tokyo 2020 Nippon Festival program, with over 200 nohgaku performers appearing in seven noh and kyogen pieces from *Okina* on the first day to *Hagoromo (The Feathered Robe)* on the last day.

- Japan Nohgaku Caravan As one link of the Agency for Cultural Affairs “Art Caravan Project centered on large-scale and high-quality cultural and artistic activities,” The Nohgaku Performers' Association sponsored a program called “Encouraging the Heart–Experiencing Nohgaku” which plans to have the participation of some 2,700 noh and kyogen performers in 71 performances in 35 venues in 20 regions from Hokkaido to Kyushu. It began at the Kyoto Kanze Noh Theatre with the noh pieces *Takamura* and *Aoinoue*. (See below)

*Revival Noh

- The Sixth Revival Noh Trial Performance featuring the noh *Takamura* was held on February 13th and July 24th at the Kyoto Kanze Noh Theatre with Mikata Shizuka as the *shite* Ono no Takamura, Katayama Kuroemon as the *tsure* ex-Emperor Go-Toba, and Hosho Kinya as the *waki* (secondary actor) Priest who visits the ex-Emperor. Takamura who by legend was believed to be an envoy to hell had a striking performance in throwing away a huge golden tablet.
- Kanze *shite* actor Kato Shingo performed the revival noh *Wada Sakamori* on February 13th at the Hiratsuka City Central Public Hall. This was the third time for Kato to revive a piece based on the *Soga Monogatari (The Tale of the Soga Brothers)*.

*The *shinsaku* (newly created) noh

At *Jacob's Well* (by Diethard Leopold) and *Nagasaki no Seibo (Our Lady of Nagasaki)*, by Tada Tomio) were performed by Kanze *shite* actor Shimizu Kanji from August 4th-8th at Tokyo's Za-Koenji sponsored by the Tessenkai. The performance added lighting and video to a noh-like stage set which not only pioneered new noh but also appealed to a new type of audience.

***Anatomy of a Dream: Shojo Midare**

This was performed in the Entrance Hall of the Setagaya Art Museum on October 5-6 as a special part of the Setagaya Art Museum's Performance Series *Trance/Entrance*. *Shite* actor Nagayama Keizo danced *Midare* which seemed to float in a fantasy space which suggested a universe with many moons. The voice of the unseen chorus (Kanze Tetsunojo) poured down from the heavens. The use of strong lighting and mirrors created a splendid blending of art and *noh*. Uzawa Hikaru who had the role of the *koken* (stage assistant) was particularly impressive in not moving in the slightest.

Oda, Sachiko

Researcher of *noh* and *kyogen*. Doctorate, Graduate Department of Literature, Hosei University. Main area of research: *Noh* and *Kyogen* Performance History and Research into Classical Works. Oda's activities combine both research and performance activities including theatre criticism, lecturing, commentary, and dramaturgy for revival *noh* and revival of ancient performance practices.

(Translation: Richard Emmert)

Kabuki

The Continuing Pandemic and the Death of Nakamura Kichiemon

Yanai Kenji

The Long Road Back to Normality

The Kabuki-za cautiously reopened in August 2020, after a long period of pandemic-imposed darkness. With the future still uncertain, theatres restarted performances with a range of strict Covid-prevention measures in place, including drastic reductions in theatre capacity, shortening of performance times, and entirely separate casts and stage personnel for each program. The Kabuki-za had been running four short programs per day, but this was expanded to three longer programs from January. However, early in the New Year on January 7, a second state of emergency was announced for Tokyo, Chiba, Kanagawa, and Saitama prefectures, and theatres were forced once again into schedule changes.

Subsequently, repeated and extended states of emergency and of strict new virus prevention measures were announced. As in other theatres around Japan, kabuki performances became subject to regulations issued by national and local government and frequent demands for cooperation. Performances were justifiably described as being like walking on a tightrope or across thin ice, and some performers became infected with the virus and had to isolate, forcing the theatres into last-minute cast changes. But finally, infection numbers began to drop and the states of emergency and other restrictions were lifted on October 1. There was a brief moment of optimism, but then a new, highly infectious variant was reported in November, and kabuki performances returned to virtually the same situation they had endured earlier in the year. In the middle of these restrictions, as part of the July 23 opening ceremony for the first Olympic Games in modern history to be held without spectators, Ichikawa Ebizo appeared wearing the flamboyant costume from *Shibaraku (Just a Minute)*.

The Death of Nakamura Kichiemon

With some brief periods of absence due to ill health, Nakamura Kichiemon appeared on the Kabuki-za stage in January in the role of Oboshi Yuranosuke in act 7 of *Chushingura* (*The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*), and in March in the role of Ishikawa Goemon in *Sanmon gosan no kiri* (*The Temple Gate and the Paulownia Crest*). However, towards the end of that month's run, on March 28, he suffered a heart attack and was taken to hospital. He was not to return to the stage before he passed away on November 28, aged 77.

Amongst his most notable roles was Benkei in *Kanjincho* (*The Subscription List*), which he had hoped to perform one more time in his eightieth year. The depth and grand scale of his acting in combination with his peerless delivery meant that he excelled in period plays adapted from the puppet theatre, including roles like Matsuomaru in *Terakoya* (*The Village School*), Taira no Tomomori in *Yoshitsune senbon zakura* (*Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees*), and the lead characters in *Shunkan* (*The Monk Shunkan*), *Kumagai jinya* (*Kumagai's Battle Camp*), *Moritsuna jinya* (*Moritsuna's Battle Camp*), *Ichijo Okura monogatari* (*The Story of Ichijo Okura*), and *Ishikiri Kajiwara* (*Stone-Cutting Kajiwara*). In modern history plays like *Genroku chushingura* (*The Genroku Era Chushingura*) and *Ii tairo* (*Lord Ii*), he was able to create characters with a rich depth and sense of light and darkness, while he could lay on the charm as the eponymous antiheroes in domestic plays like *Kochiyama*, *Banzui Chobei*, and *Hokaibo*. He also gained widespread popularity on the long-running television drama series *Onihei hankacho* (*Onihei's Detective Records*). While he was always destined to succeed to the art of his adoptive father Nakamura Kichiemon I, which he accomplished spectacularly, he also managed to expand both the breadth and depth of his unique approach to his art. It is always a shock to lose any great actor, but the sense of loss I felt when I heard of Kichiemon's passing towards the end of 2021 was beyond words.

Outstanding Performances

The decision by Kataoka Nizaemon and Bando Tamasaburo to revive some of their legendary performances attracted a great deal of attention. In particular,

their two-part revival in April and June of the play that created the “Taka-Tama” boom thirty-six years before, *Sakurahime azuma bunsho* (*The Scarlet Princess of Edo*) had a near-historical impact. Amazingly, both actors managed to present performances that fused surprising youthfulness and the brilliance of their fully mature art. They also revived the Dote no Oroku and Kimon no Kibe plots from *Osome Hisamatsu ukina no yomiuri* (*The Romance of Osome and Hisamatsu*) in February, and the Rotaku to Onbobori sections of *Tokaido Yotsuya kaidan* (*Yotsuya Ghost Stories*) in September, the latter for the first time in thirty-eight years. While one could argue that these performances only happened because of the pandemic-imposed restrictions on performance lengths, their significance also lay in the excitement and energy they generated in a moment of gloom and restriction, not just for kabuki fans but for the theatrical world as a whole.

Onoe Kikugoro played the role of Kataoka Naojiro in *Yuki no yube Iriya no azemichi* (*The Snowy Path through the Ricefields of Iriya*) at the Kabuki-za in March, and Hayano Kanpei in the sixth act of *Kanadehon chushingura* at the same theatre in May. Each was well received and allowed Kikugoro to present his art in all its perfection. His graceful portrayal of Kudo Suketsune in *Kotobuki Soga no taimen* (*The Felicitous Soga Encounter*) at the Kabuki-za in November delighted audiences with its combination of dignity, bitterness, and eroticism.

Matsumoto Hakuo performed with his distinctive gravitas as Matsuomaru in the *Kurumabiki* (*Pulling the Carriage Apart*) scene from *Sugawara denju tenarai kagami* (*Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy*) at the Kabuki-za in January, together with his son and grandson. In April, again at the Kabuki-za, he rotated roles with his son Matsumoto Koshiro, becoming the oldest actor to ever play the role of Benkei in a regular run. His was an intensely spirited Benkei that truly felt like it was animated by his entire physical being. I was also very moved by his performance in *Ii Tairo*, with Nakamura Kaishun in the role of Oshizu no Kata at the Kabuki-za in November. Both created tranquil portrayals of individuals caught up in a tumultuous historical moment.

Nakamura Baigyoku demonstrated both the heights of grace and a substantial presence as Minamoto no Raiko in *Kumo no ito oyozume banashi* (*Battle with the Spider Spirit*) at the Kabuki-za in July, and as Ariwara no Yukihira in

Suma no utsushie (Suma Sketches) in September. As Fukuoka Mitsugi in *Ise ondo (The Ise Dances and Love's Dull Blade)* at the National Theatre in October, his acting was suffused with a delicate wash of natural softness, creating a very rarely seen impression.

The Zenshinza Theatre Company celebrated the 90th anniversary of their founding at the National Theatre this year. They performed one of their best-known plays, their distinctive version of *Shunkan*, with its unique script and staging coming together very successfully to create a tightly knit sense of atmosphere. I was reminded once again of the importance of reworking classic plays.

The Next Generation and Younger Actors

With the passing of Kichimon and the majority of senior actors now approaching their eighties, there has been a rapid acceleration in the responsibilities of the next generation.

Notably, Ichikawa Ennosuke was able to take advantage of the shortened performance times by abbreviating and rearranging existing plays and presenting them in new formats. The plays in question, all performed at the Kabuki-za, were *Kagamiyama gonichi no Iwafuji: Iwafuji kائي hen (Mt. Kagamiyama and the Latter Days of Iwafuji)* in August, *Tenjiku Tokubei imayobanashi: Koheiji gaiden (The Updated Tale of Tenjiku Tokubei: Koheiji)* in October, a digest entitled *Hanakurabe gishi no kaomise (A Contest of Young Stars: Gala of Loyal Retainers)* in November, which combined the opening and closing scenes of *Chushingura* with some of the spin-off dramas featuring characters who don't appear in the classical narrative, and finally, *Shinpan Date no juyaku (New Ten Roles of the Date Clan)* in December.

As well as his role as Benkei in the excellent performance of *Kanjincho* mentioned above, Matsumoto Koshiro also appeared for the first time in the puppet-theatre adaptations *Yoshikata Saigo (The Death of Yoshikata)* in August and *Moritsuna jinya* in September, both at the Kabuki-za. His performances were very solid, raising expectations that these kinds of period plays will be carried through the next generation.

In his portrayal of Chobei the plasterer in *Ninjo banashi Bunshichi mottoi (A*

Story of Human Feeling: Bunshichi and the Invention of Bunshichi Topknot Ties) at the National Theatre's annual *Kabuki kansho kyoshitsu* (Kabuki Appreciation Workshop) performances in June, Onoe Shoroku brought a fresh sense of youthfulness to Chobei's relationship with his daughter. He also demonstrated his impressive skills as a dancer in *Tsuchigumo (The Earth Spider)* in May and *Tachi Nusubito (The Sword Thief)* in October, both at the Kabuki-za.

Onoe Kikunosuke showed us some strikingly powerful performances, including a relaxed elegance in *Kagamijishi (The Lion Dance)* at the Kabuki-za in June, while his Shirai Gonpachi in *Suzugamori (The Suzugamori Execution Grounds)* at the same theatre in July was replete with a combination of softness and tension. His performance as Takechi Mitsuhide in *Toki wa Ima Kikyo no Hataage (The Time is Now: Raising the Bellflower Flag)* at the National Theatre in March, under his father-in-law Kichiemon's direction, provided a powerful and convincing demonstration of the transmission of the art.

There were other memorable performances by younger actors this year. Onoe Ukon's performances as Ojo Kishisa in the riverbank scene from *Sannin Kichisa (Three Thieves Named Kichisa)* in May and as Oshichi in the watchtower scene from *Shochikubai Yushima no Kakegaku (Votive Tablets at Yushima Shrine)* both possessed an almost wild sense of novel enthusiasm that illuminated the roles with a unique sense of reality.

Following Ennosuke's infection with Covid-19, his six quick-change roles in *Kagamiyama gonichi no Iwafuji* had to be covered by Bando Minosuke at very short notice from the first day of the run. Minosuke covered the roles until August 18, and the effort he put in was very apparent on stage. Also impressive was his invigorating and skilful performance as Soga no Goro in *Kotobuki Soga no taimen* at the Kabuki-za in November, as part of the memorial program marking the seventh anniversary of the death of his father, Bando Mitsugoro X.

Hanakurabe gishi no kaomise saw younger actors taking the main roles, and the performance was deliberately structured to highlight the next generation. The role of Oboshi Yuranosuke was played by Nakamura Kasho. He also put in masterful performances as Kudo Suketsune in *Kotohogite hanagata tsudou hashiradate (The Auspicious Pillar-Erecting Ceremony, Enacted by Young Stars)*

in January, and as Fuwa Banzaemon in *Sayaate (Clashing Scabbards)* in August, both at the Kabuki-za.

Obituaries

Kataoka Hidetaro passed away on May 23. He had only just been awarded the Order of the Rising Sun in April. Hidetaro was acclaimed as an important onnagata actor in roles such as Umegawa in *Fuingiri (The Courier for Hell)*, Koharu in *Kawasho (The Love Suicides at Amijima)*, and Oyone in *Numazu (Vengeance at Iga Pass)*, where he brought a rich flavour of Kamigata (the Kyoto and Osaka area) to his performances. He was equally skilled in middle-aged *kashagata* roles like Oen in *Fuingiri* or Okisa in *Yoshidaya (Love Letter from the Licensed Quarter)*. He was also able to demonstrate his distinctive style in old woman roles in period plays, including Tatsuta no mae and Kakuju in *Domyoji (Domyoji Temple)*, Mimyo in *Moritsuna Jinya*, and Koshiji in *Terutora haizen (Terutora Serves the Tray)*. He also sometimes played male roles like Manjiro in *Ise ondo (The Ise Dances and Love's Dull Blade)* or Sakuramaru in *Kurumabiki*, to which he brought an unforgettable softness and charm.

Torii Kiyomitsu, the ukiyo-e artist and scenic designer, passed away on May 24. For many years, she had created the painted signboards for the Kabuki-za, and she was in the middle of creating the signs for the June production when she died unexpectedly.

Yanai, Kenji

Born in Tokushima prefecture in 1970. Following a period at the National Theatre, he now teaches at Meiji University. Holds a doctorate in literature. Specializes in the history of Japanese performing arts, with an emphasis on kabuki. His books include: *Meiji kiwamono kabuki: Sora tobu godaime Kikugoro (Sensational Meiji Period Kabuki: Kikugoro V Flying through the Sky)*, Hakuishisha Publishing), *Chabudaigaeshi no kabuki nyumon (An Introduction to Kabuki Surprising Enough to Overturn the Dinner Table)*, Shinchosha Publishing). He also writes kabuki reviews for *The Tokyo Shimbun* newspaper.

(Translation: Alan Cummings)

Bunraku

A Master Bows Out, and New Possibilities

Kameoka Noriko

The world of bunraku continued to suffer the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, with theatres running three programs per day and a reduction in audience capacity, among other measures. Many bunraku fans are elderly and they tended to stay away from the theatres. It was a great shame that many high-quality performances played in front of half-empty houses. Yet, in spite of these difficulties, that the theatre was able to mount performances that aimed to retain and expand its audience, gave me some hope for the future.

For bunraku fans, the saddest event of the year was certainly the retirement of the puppeteer, Living National Treasure, Person of Cultural Merit, and member of the Japan Art Academy, Yoshida Minosuke. The news was unexpectedly announced in the middle of the performance run at the National Bunraku Theatre in April. It was reported that Minosuke said, “In August I will turn 88 years old, so this month will be the last when I give my body and soul to the stage.” Minosuke was born in Osaka in 1933, the son of the puppeteer Kiritake Montaro II. He started performing as a puppeteer from the age of six, and in that sense, he truly was a product of the world of bunraku. After the war and still young in years, he first started to distinguish himself, and in 1961 he succeeded to the name Yoshida Minosuke III. Already by that time he had graduated to performing lead female roles. He specialized in the showy, charming ‘princess’ or courtesan roles, like Yaegaki-hime in *Honcho nijushiko* (*Twenty-Four Japanese Paragons of Filial Piety*) and Yugiri in *Yoshidaya* (*Love Letter from the Licensed Quarter*), helping to create in these plays a substantial part of the appeal of modern bunraku. In 1998 he collapsed with a brain haemorrhage, but his indomitable grit saw him quickly make a return to the stage. He spent 81 years of his life on stage and continually pursuing the beauty of bunraku puppets. In his final

performance at the National Bunraku Theatre in April, he performed the role of the heroine Kinshojo in *Kokusenya Kassen (The Battles of Coxinga)*, leaving behind memories of his brilliance to all who saw him perform.

The year had happier moments too. Minosuke's most senior student, Kiritake Kanjuro, was recognized as a Living National Treasure. Kanjuro was also born in Osaka in 1953, the son of the puppeteer and later Living National Treasure Kiritake Kanjuro II. Shortly after graduating from middle school, he started studying with Minosuke who had studied under the same teacher as his father. He was thus trained by two masters: his father who specialized in gallant male roles, and Minosuke in charming female roles. Kanjuro has thus been able to develop into a puppeteer with a rare degree of stage sense, capable of playing both male and female parts, and he has taken lead roles almost every month. Kanjuro remarked at the press conference that for the sake of the future of bunraku, he wants to help develop more new plays. There is truth in that statement: what contemporary bunraku needs is both the transmission of the classical repertoire and new plays and styles of performance that can bring in new audiences.

In the autumn, the chanter and Living National Treasure Toyotake Sakitayu was named a Person of Cultural Merit. Sakitayu's father, Takemoto Tsunatayu VIII, was also a Living National Treasure so Sakitayu began his training at a young age. As I write in January 2022, he is currently the only chanter who holds the honour of chanting the key final scene (*kiriba*) of plays. He combines a deep interpretation of the texts with a chanting style that ranges from the delicate to the dynamic, allowing him to cover the full repertoire from *sewamono* domestic plays to *jidaimono* period pieces. His outstanding technique allows him to truly chant the soul of bunraku. In the spring, the shamisen player Tsuruzawa Enza, who accompanies Sakitayu in regular performances, was awarded the Medal of Honour with Purple Ribbon.

At the press conference Sakitayu used a baseball reference to explain his future ambition, "to train chanters who are capable of batting cleanup". What the bunraku world needs is, indeed, the nurturing of the next generation of chanters who can carry the art forward. Takemoto Chitosedayu and Toyotake Rosetayu, now in their fifties, have started to chant key scenes in programmes, and the

generation above them, Toyotake Rodayu and Takemoto Shikorodayu, both now in their seventies, are performing with admirable solidity. However, there is something of a gap before we come to younger chanters like Takemoto Oritayu, who is still in his forties. Happily, there are some promising younger chanters who have started to emerge and we can only pray that their art grows large-boned, well-built, and strong.

In the following section, I would like to look back at the year's regular schedule of performances in Osaka and Tokyo.

The January program at the National Bunraku Theatre in Osaka was a celebratory performance for Tsuruzawa Seiji who in 2020 became the first ever bunraku shamisen player to be named a Person of Cultural Merit. Seiji played the lead shamisen in the *Michiyuki Hatsune no tabi* (*Journey with the Drum*) scene from *Yoshitsune senbon zakura* (*Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees*). With his razor-sharp tone and the facility of his command over the fast and slow tempos, he provided a fully satisfying demonstration of the appeal of the *michiyuki* interlude. Rosetayu's chanting was beautifully expansive, while the leading puppeteer pair from the next generation, Yoshida Tamasuke as Tadanobu the Fox and Yoshida Ichisuke as Shizuka Gozen, put on a spectacular show. The *Yamagoe* (*Mountain-crossing*) section where Shizuka leans backwards and tosses her fan to Tadanobu was perfectly executed, and the stage as a whole had a brilliance to it that matched the New Year mood. Also on the program was Minosuke playing the part of Sakuramaru in the *Sakuramaru seppuku no dan* (*Sakuramaru's Suicide*) scene from *Sugawara denju tenarai kagami* (*Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy*). His portrayal of the tragedy of this young man whose life is ended too soon was beautifully expressive.

The February program in Tokyo at the National Theatre's small hall once again celebrated Seiji's nomination as a Person of Cultural Merit, and this time he performed the first half of the *Goten no dan* (*Palace*) scene from *Meiboku Sendai hagi* (*The Precious Incense and Autumn Flowers of Sendai*), again with Rosetayu.

The April program in Osaka saw the retirement of Minosuke, as I already described above. In the days after the announcement was made, the reduced

capacity theatre became packed, everyone wanting to see Minosuke one last time. The last day of the run had to be brought forward one day due to a new state of emergency, and had it not been for the pandemic, he would have been able to bid farewell from the stage to many more of his fans.

The May performances in Tokyo were cancelled entirely due to the pandemic. In June in Osaka the normal *Bunraku for Beginners* educational program for fans new to the theatre went ahead, but the Saturday and Sunday performances were cancelled.

Fortunately, in July and early August the National Bunraku Theatre in Osaka was able to mount a special summer performance. The third part of the program, the late show, was a performance of perennial summer favourite *Natsumatsuri Naniwa kagami* (*Summer Festival: Mirror of Osaka*). The combination of the artistic verisimilitude of Yoshida Tamao as the hero Danshichi Kurobei, and the energy expended by the chanters including Shikorodayu and Oritayu created an impassioned performance with a distinctively Osaka flavour. Tamao's health has been good this year, and the scale and strength of his performance as Matsuoemon (in fact, Higuchi Jiro Kanemitsu in disguise) in *Hirakana seisui* (*The Popular Rise and Fall of the Heike Clan*) in the autumn program in Osaka was dazzling. In the same performance, Kiritake Kanjuro played the role of the courtesan Umegae in the *Kanzaki ageya no dan* (*Kanzaki House of Assignment*) scene, allowing the full range of her emotion to erupt. Yoshida Kazuo played the role of the wife Kuzunoha in *Ashiya Doman ouchi kagami* (*A Courtly Mirror of Ashiya Doman*), a role that his teacher Yoshida Bunjaku had enjoyed great success with. Kazuo created an exciting portrayal of the role, deftly poised between maternal emotion and acrobatics.

After this autumn performance, most of the restrictions on theatre capacity were removed and we returned to a situation very similar to before the pandemic. Only the very front row and some of the seats immediately in front of the chanter and shamisen player's dais are currently left empty.

Closing out the year was the December performance at the small hall of the National Theatre in Tokyo of several scenes from *Kanadehon chushingura* (*The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*). The scenes performed were the *Momono* *yakata*

Honzo matsukiri (Honzo's Pine Branch Cutting), *Gebasaki shinmotsu* (The Bribing of Moronao), *Denchu ninjo* (The Attack in the Palace), *Enya Hangan seppuku* (The Suicide of Hangan), *Shiro akewatashi* (The Handing Over of the Castle), and *Michiyuki tabiji no yomeiri* (The Bridal Journey). The troupe for this performance centered on younger artists, but ticket sales were good. Some of this year's performances had to be cancelled due to the pandemic, but as the year ended infection figures in Japan began to fall rapidly. We can only hope that 2022 will provide us with a more amenable environment for bunraku performances.

On August 21 at the National Bunraku Theatre there was a puppetless *Bunraku sujururi no kai* performance, which featured the first appearance at the event by Oritayu. He performed the *Teshimaya aburamise* (Teshimaya Oilshop) scene from *Onnagoroshi abura jigoku* (Woman Killer and the Hell of Oil), in a version that was composed by his teacher Sakitayu's father, Takemoto Tsunatayu VIII and the shamisen player Takezawa Yashichi X, giving a demonstration of his genuine power as a chanter.

Aside from the regular schedule of productions, there were two other performances that pointed towards possible futures for bunraku. The first was the February production at the ROHM Theatre Kyoto, which included the *Takenaka toride* (Takenaka's Fortress) scene from *Konoshitakage hazama gassen* (Konoshita and the Battle of Okehazama), the first revival of this play in 87 years to include puppets. The production was supervised by Kinoshita Yuichi, from the Kinoshita Kabuki company, who fuse classical theatre with modernity. On the same bill was a modern play written by the puppeteer Kiritake Kanjuro, *Tsume moyo yumeji no kadomatsu* (Kadomatsu's Dream), whose novel casting brought many new audience members to the theatre to experience bunraku for the first time. *Tsume moyo* is a story about a *tsume ningyo*, one of the simple, one-man puppets that are normally used for bit parts in crowd scenes, and it provides a humorous look at the joys and sorrows of the theatre. Worthy of special note was the chanting of the whole play by Takemoto Hirotoyū, who is the youngest member of the company at just twenty-five years old and who is still only four years into his career. He was supported by the veteran shamisen player Tsuruzawa Seisuke, but

even so, this was a remarkable casting choice for a regular performance. The heavy weight of responsibility that Hirotoyasu must have felt can well be imagined, but there was an ease to his chanting that evidenced great promise for the future.

The second event was a ground-breaking performance entitled *Bunraku muso: keishoden* (*Bunraku Dreams: A Tale of Succession*) (August 7, National Bunraku Theatre), where master puppeteers and their students together performed roles of the same rank. The event was proposed by one of the mid-rank puppeteers, Yoshida Tamasho, and three pairs participated: Kiritake Kanjuro and his pupil Kiritake Kansuke, Yoshida Tamao and Yoshida Tamamichi, and the father and son (and fellow students) duo of Yoshida Ichisuke and Yoshida Minohisa. The young students had around ten years of study of behind them, and most of them are still working as leg manipulators for their teachers or senior students. In other words, this event presented them with the chance to perform a major role on the same stage as their teachers, an opportunity that would never normally exist. Tamasho's reasoning for the project was, "there's an unmistakable difference in ability of course, but I believe that during their training they can definitely learn something from performing the same class of role with their teachers." The performance was funded with support from Arts Support Kansai, which uses private donations to support artistic activities in the Kansai region, and from the first-ever crowdfunding campaign in bunraku. The initial goal of 300,000 yen (\$2,600) was reached in a single day, and the campaign went on to raise almost 3,500,000 yen (\$30,000). Tamasho and the performers looked both grateful and excited by the extent to which fans are willing to support bunraku. The whole program had an agreeably handmade feel to it, down to the pamphlets and program which were designed by the staff themselves. On the day the theatre was virtually full. Enthusiastic applause greeted the performance of the calm teachers and the young students, who threw their all into manipulating their puppets with sweat streaming down their foreheads.

Due to the pandemic, the number of performances in spring and autumn outside the major cities has fallen by almost half. Even the regular performances in Osaka and Tokyo are in a perilous state. Yet, there now we can see an escape route. Amongst all the ad hoc experiments of the past two years, we have now

begun to identify methods to maintain a Covid-safe environment while still putting on outstanding productions. While we continue to hope for the end of the pandemic, I pray that bunraku will continue to pass on its art to the next generation and continue to seek out new possibilities.

Kameoka, Noriko

Special reporter and editor of the cultural section of the Osaka head office of the *Sankei Shimbun* newspaper, responsible for coverage of Japanese traditional performing arts. Joined the newspaper in 1990. In addition to theatre reviews and interviews, she also writes the ongoing columns *Riken no ken* (*Seeing Yourself from the Outside*) and *Koten no yume o miru* (*Dreaming of the Classics*). Has published several books including *Bunraku zanmai* (*Devoted to Bunraku*) and *Yume: Heisei no Tojuro Tanjo* (*Dream: The Birth of a Heisei Tojuro*).

(Translation: Alan Cummings)

Musicals

Regaining Momentum All at Once

Hagio Hitomi

We can say that the Japanese musical world regained vitality in 2021. In 2020, after the musical scene suddenly became quiet due to the COVID-19 situation, the number of performances gradually increased, though they had to be presented cautiously. Given this fact, it seemed as if the musical world became active again for real in 2021. Understandably, it was still like treading on thin ice, and there were some productions that had to be cancelled. Even so, the total number of performances increased drastically this year, which must be due to the underlying strength of the Japanese musical world.

059

Much-Awaited Translated Musicals Opening One after Another

Broadway musicals that musical fans were looking forward to were premiered in Japan at last. The Shiki Theatre Company's *Frozen* and *Newsies* produced by Toho Co., Ltd. and TBS were both postponed in 2020 and opened in Japan almost a year later. Both musicals were very popular and sold out as soon as the tickets went on sale. As *Newsies* ran for only a month, the audience quickly bought the tickets. *Frozen*, on the other hand, had been scheduled for a long run and it was a sign of a promising start for the production.

Frozen, which opened on Broadway in 2018, closed soon after performances on Broadway were suspended due to COVID-19. After playing in Sydney from December 2020 to May 2021, the Japan premiere of *Frozen* opened on June 24. It was followed by Melbourne (June 25), London (August 27), and Hamburg (November 8). The Shiki Theatre Company produced a replica version of the original Broadway production of *Frozen*, using the same staging, scenic design, and other elements. However, it was far better than the original version. In the original production, the scene changes and the magical scene in which Elsa

builds an ice castle using her supernatural power was somewhat unstylish but the Japanese production did not give the same impression. Perhaps it was due to the technical aspects that had improved during the three years since it was premiered and at the same time, it reminded us how good Japanese technical staff are at their job.

The Japanese-cast version of *Newsies* was another production that exceeded the original Broadway version. It is a drama about the newsboy strike in New York that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century and based on the book written by Harvey Fierstein. Koike Shuichiro translated the lyrics into Japanese and directed the Japanese version. While maintaining the style of the original musical film, he added many dance scenes, carefully depicted the characters, and created a lively stage production. The success of the production was probably largely due to the efforts of the lead actor, Kyomoto Taiga, and the other cast members. They must have been polishing their dance and acting skills after the show was postponed.

060

Eventually, numerous translated musicals were premiered in Japan during 2021 and the total number was around the same as usual. The first Japanese-cast version of *Barnum*, which was premiered on Broadway in 1980, opened in 2021. The musical depicts the life of Phineas Taylor Barnum, who was a real circus entertainer. The success of the movie *Greatest Showman*, which is about the same person, probably led to the production of *Barnum* in Japan at this time. Kato Kazuki played the main role. The production that was directed by Ogita Koichi included circus acts as well but it was a pity that the staging was somewhat low-key due to COVID-related self-restrictions such as keeping a certain distance between the stage and the audience.

Waitress and *The Prom* were Japan premieres of the latest Broadway musicals. The Japanese version of *Waitress* followed the original version directed by Diane Paulus. The lively performance of Takahata Mitsuki, who played the heroine, and the powerful company created an uplifting musical celebrating independent women and their friendship. *The Prom*, which was directed by Kishitani Goro, is a musical comedy depicting a commotion over a lesbian high schooler (played by Aoi Wakana). The Japanese version put more focus on the

bond between the heroine and her mother, which was a new idea that was not in the original version.

Another musical besides *The Prom* that dealt with the gender issue was *Jamie* (original title: *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*), which was originally produced in London's West End. It is a story about a high schooler called Jamie (Morisaki Win and Takahashi Fu were double-cast), who aspires to becoming a drag queen. In this exhilarating musical comedy focusing on diversity, the senior drag queens were played by veteran actors such as Ishikawa Zen, Imai Kiyotaka and Yoshino Keigo, who seemed to be having fun performing their characters, and they added more layers to the stage performance.

Horipro Inc. that produced *Jamie* is making more and more bold attempts. It presented *17 Again* (book by Marco Pennette, music and lyrics written by Alan Zachary and Michael Weiner), which is based on a film, and this production was the world premiere of the musical. It was directed by Tani Kenichi and was also the first musical for the actor Takeuchi Ryoma, whose presence shone out. Horipro also produced the Japan premiere of *Allegiance*, which is a serious story about Japanese-Americans during the Second World War. Kaiho Naoto and Hamada Megumi performed well, responding to the down-to-earth approach of Stafford Arima's staging. The Japan premiere of the Korean musical *Jack the Ripper*, which was translated into Japanese and directed by Shirai Akira, was also produced by Horipro. Horipro probably now tops the list of Japanese production companies in terms of the number of newly produced musicals.

Among the translated foreign musicals presented this year, *Hope* was another Korean musical. It was directed by the actor Niuro Shinya, who made a directorial debut.

The American musical *October Sky*, which is based on the true-life novel and film, was directed by Itagaki Kyoichi and was presented in Japan for the first time. Although it is a heartwarming story, the script had room for refinement. I hope it will be revived after Itagaki Kyoichi embellishes the script. As will be mentioned later, Itagaki had also directed a few original musicals and his activities stood out during 2021.

Harada Ryo is another director of musicals who was prolific. He directed

three Broadway musicals, both old and new, during 2021, and showed his directorial skills. *Nice Work if You Can Get It* (played by Flower troupe of Takarazuka Revue Company) is a musical that opened on Broadway in 2012 and it unfolds with Gershwin's famous music. Although the original production lacked tension, the well-crafted staging of the Japanese version turned the musical into a bubbly and delightful production. *Promises, Promises* (Cosmos troupe of Takarazuka Revue Company) is a musical that premiered on Broadway in 1968. Though it was updated to fit the norms of today's society, the pleasant and laid-back atmosphere of the original story could still be felt. The other musical that Harada directed this year was *Anything Goes* (produced by Toho), which opened at Meijiza Theater in Tokyo. It was scheduled to run for a total of almost two months, including a tour to Nagoya, Osaka and Fukuoka but due to the COVID-19 situation, it closed after playing at Meijiza for only one week, which is a shame because it was such a splendid production, including the beautiful scenery designed by Matsui Rumi.

Drastic Increase of Original Musicals

The number of original musicals is increasing more than ever. The levels of the productions are improving for sure, probably proving that the Japanese musical world has matured. Among them, *Box of Spirits and Goblins* (*Moryo no hako*) and *Fist of the North Star* (*Hokuto no ken*, referred to as *Fist* hereafter) were especially amazing and delightful.

Box of Spirits and Goblins is based on Kyogoku Natsuhiko's popular novel. The long story was skillfully trimmed down and unfolded at one stretch by aptly using the chorus. Itagaki Kyoichi, who wrote the book and lyrics, and who directed the piece, showed his talent. The original music composed by Ozawa Tokifumi was wonderful as well.

Another musical that Itagaki wrote the book and lyrics for and also directed was *Grey—Can't Be So Gentle* (*Grey—Sonna ni yasashiku nante narenaiyo*) (music by Kuwabara Mako). It was about divisions created by social media and the theme was extremely up to date.

Fist is based on a popular comic book and was produced by Horipro with the

international market in mind. Takahashi Ako, who also wrote the lyrics, adapted the original story by making it much shorter and turned it into a well-made script. Ishimaru Sachiko's staging was smooth-flowing and appealing to the eyes. Much of the music composed by Frank Wildhorn was legato and matched the drama, which was unlike his usual style of music with dynamic rhythms that sometimes sound too aggressive. Apparently, the Japanese music staff worked on the arrangement and made considerable changes. This kind of revamping should be done more often in future projects as it would improve the quality of the production, as seen in the case of *Fist*.

Shochiku Co., Ltd. produced *Goya*, which was about the life of the painter Goya and focused on how he ended up drawing black pictures. The musical was conceived and written by G2. It uses good material and the musical numbers in a Spanish style written by Kiyozuka Shinya were also appealing. However, it was a pity that the scenes explaining the historical background were too long. I hope it will be revised and produced again.

Shiki Theatre Company premiered *The Myth of the Beginning Tree: The Stories of the Kosoado Woods* (*Hajimari no ki no shinwa–Kosoado no mori no monogatari*) (book and lyrics by Minami Keiichiro, music by Kanematsu Shu), which is an original family musical. It is a heartwarming story delivering a message about the bond between people and how we live in the heart of nature's bounty, which are typical themes of Shiki's musicals.

Furuta Arata and Onoe Ukon costarred in *Hygiene–Rhythm & Vacuum* (*Eisei–Rizumu & Bakyumu*). It is a story about a father and son who run a business disposing of urine and come up in the world by means fair or foul (book and staging by Fukuhara Mitsunori). It is a dense human drama reflecting social and economic structure, and the subject matter, the text, and the incidents that occur were all stimulating. The music written by Mizuno Yoshiki (Ikimonogakari) and Masuda Tosh matched the drama.

A Sign of Affection (*Yubisaki to renren*) based on a girls' comic book was small in scale but a memorable musical. It is a drama depicting the love of a deaf college girl (played by Toyohara Erika). The sign language developed into flowing dance movements, which were choreographed by Maeda Kiyomi, while the

heroine's feelings were expressed through songs as in usual musicals. Not only was it a lovely story but it was also a delightful production using every characteristic of musicals. It was made by a female creative team, including the choreographer Maeda mentioned above as well as Iijima Sanae, who wrote the script, Ogino Kiyoko, who wrote the music, and the director Tanaka Maiko, who also worked on the script. It was produced by Watanabe Entertainment Co., Ltd.

The Snow troupe of Takarazuka Revue Company presented *fff: Fortississimo* (*fff: Fortississimo—Kanki ni utae!*). It is about Beethoven, who decided to choose a career in music and eventually soared to new heights. It was an original musical in which the character setup, and how historical figures like Napoleon and Goethe are woven into the historical backdrop, were well crafted. The music was used effectively as well. The musical written and directed by Ueda Kumiko turned into a production that lived up to her reputation.

Revivals of Translated Musicals and the Strong Showing of Long-Established Musicals

064

Besides other original works which have not been mentioned, there were many musicals that were revived, ranging from epic productions such as *Les Misérables* and *Mozart!* to small shows including *The Last Five Years* and *Glory Days*.

There were some noticeable cases in which directors who had made themselves a name for directing straight plays were chosen to direct revivals of small and medium-scale musicals that were remade. For instance, Mori Shintaro directed *Peter Pan* in 2021. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was directed by Hisawa Yusuke of Gekidan Chocolate Cake theatre company, which is known for presenting plays dealing with social issues. The world of musicals in Japan is most surely expanding through its diverse resources of creative talent.

Meanwhile, long-established musical theatre troupes have been striving hard. The Ongakuza Musical, which presented the new version of the *Love of Seven Dolls* this year, have lent musicals in their repertoire such as *Shabondama tonda, soramade tonda* (lit. *Soap bubbles flew, they flew to the universe*) and *Mademoiselle Mozart* to other productions. The Musical Company It's Follies that produced *Box of Spirits and Goblins* is also steadily moving ahead. The

Musical-za, whose representative work is *Himeyuri*, has started to present new original musicals consistently.

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Japan's musical world continued to move forward incessantly during 2021 despite the COVID-19 situation, when musicals had to be presented as if one was treading on thin ice. However, to bring back the audiences who have either grown apart from musicals or are taking a wait-and-see attitude, and to develop new audience segments are challenges for the future.

Hagio, Hitomi

Hagio Hitomi is a film and theatre critic. She started her career as a newspaper journalist and has written theatre reviews for newspapers such as Asahi Shimbun as well as column series in musical magazines. She is the author of *Take Me Out to the Musical!* (*Myujikaru ni tsuretette!*) and *A Hundred People Involved in "Les Misérables"* (*Re mizeraburu no hyakunin*). She also wrote and edited *Broadway Musicals: All About the Tony Awards* (*Burodowei myujikaru-Toni sho no subete*) and *Your First Musical Film Selected by a Professional: Hagio Hitomi's Top 50* (*Puro ga eranda hajimete no myujikaru eiga: Hagio Hitomi besuto serekushon 50*).

(Translation: Sumida Michiyo)

Contemporary Theatre

Probing Contemporary Society, Encountering the Dead

Yamaguchi Hiroko

The ebb and flow of the coronavirus pandemic's waves continued to buffet the Japanese contemporary theatre world in 2021. Just one member of the cast falling sick meant all performances would be canceled until they returned a negative test. This article looks back on the plays that emerged amid these stringent circumstances.

066

Examining the "Air" of a Society Devoid of Inspection and Introspection

In July and August, while the country remained under a state of emergency, Tokyo nonetheless went ahead with the Olympic and Paralympic Games. In February, former prime minister Mori Yoshiro resigned as president of the organizing committee over disparaging remarks he made about women. Three other men centrally involved in the opening and closing ceremonies also resigned or were dismissed after it came to light that they had, respectively, insulted women, admitted bullying disabled people in the past, and made fun of the Holocaust. Despite their nominal celebration of diversity, the actual reality of the Olympics once again reared its head.

Though the opening ceremony for the Olympics was poorly received overall, Moriyama Mirai's threnodic solo dance attracted attention. Immediately prior to this, Moriyama had played the architect Zaha Hadid in the double bill *Unfulfilled Ghost and Monster—Zaha/Tsuruga* (*Miren no yurei to kaibutsu—Zaha, Tsuruga*) at Kanagawa Arts Theatre, written and directed by Okada Toshiki. Zaha Hadid won the design contest for the New National Stadium, which would serve as the main venue for the Tokyo Olympics, but the costs of constructing her design

became controversial and the plan was eventually scrapped. Based on the style of *mugen* (dream) noh, the first play (whose title is a play on a Japanese word for “setbacks” that is also a homonym for the architect’s name) conjured forth the late Hadid, who died in 2016 at the age of sixty-five, through words, music, and dance, and allowed the audience to envision what her stadium would have looked like. And all while evoking once again just how badly Japan treated this Iraq-born female architect. The *shite* (main role) in the other play, *Tsuruga*, is a “nuclear fuel cycle policy phantom” who appears on a coast where a fast breeder reactor, inoperative for almost its entire life and scheduled for decommissioning, is visible. (The title of the play refers to a city in Fukui Prefecture that is known for its nuclear power plants.) This reflection of Japanese society, which pushes failures under the carpet without fully examining them, resembled the disarray surrounding the pandemic and Olympics in a vividly timely way.

Japanese society is controlled by a certain “air” or public mood. One of the things responsible for that is the news media, which Nagai Ai has probed through *The Air*, her series of plays that came to a close with its third iteration, *The Air Ver. 3: And He Left (Za kuki ver.3 soshite kare wa satta...)*, staged by her company, Nitosha, and directed by Nagai herself. The play is set at a television network. The first half is a light comedy in which Hoshino, the producer of a news show critical of the government, settles a score with Yokomatsu, a former newspaper reporter turned political pundit who now serves as a de facto spokesperson for the government, but then the mood of the play shifts. His sense of mission as a journalist reawakened, Yokomatsu proposes to Hoshino that he make public a secret document that will hit the government hard. Hoshino starts to waver. “You could believe you were carrying out justice,” Yokomatsu tells her, “but without ever confronting your own weakness or deceit.” Hoshino is forced to confront how she was thinking of her own interests. The bitter final scene shone a light on the source of the air that lurks within us.

The dominance of a certain air. Lack of inspection and introspection. This echoes the situation eighty years ago, as portrayed in Gekidan Chocolate Cake’s *Point of No Return (Kikan funo-ten)*, written by Furukawa Takeshi and directed by Hisawa Yusuke. Why did Japan plunge into a reckless war? Based on the

real-life conference held with young elites from the government agencies, military, and private sector some six months before the conflict between Japan and the United States started, and which predicted that Japan would lose a war, the play explored why they were unable to stop the country from following the path their leaders had so foolishly set them on.

Reflecting on Our Relations with Others

We should recognize diversity. This is common sense, but have we really embraced it fully? Written by Yokoyama Takuya and directed by Matsumoto Yuko, the Bungakuza staging of *Djungarian (Jangarian)* delicately asked this question. Among the family who owns a pork cutlet restaurant in an old, down-to-earth part of Osaka, opinion is divided over employing a Mongolian student. Even though Japan is hugely dependent on the labor of students and so-called “technical intern trainees” from other parts of Asia, the country does not allow mass immigration. Foreigners also experience violations of their human rights. Against such a backdrop, the play delved into the minds of people who fixate on minor differences and draw distinctions between themselves and others. The decision to make the veteran cook who keeps the restaurant going an ethnic Korean added a further layer of complexity.

DULL-COLORED POP’s *Nemunoki Ob/Gyn on the Hill (Oka no ue, Nemunoki Sanfujinka)*, written and directed by Tani Kenichi, confronted the issue of gender through the themes of pregnancy and childbirth. By performing the same script in two versions—one where the genders of the actors matched the roles, and one where they did not—the production was stimulating and insightful.

Intolerance harms diversity. Depicting the loose community created by people of various backgrounds in a Japanese enclave in Thailand during the first half of the seventeenth century, MONO’s production of *Ayutthaya (Ayutaya)*, written and directed by Tsuchida Hideo, expressed important points in a soft tone. “Whenever we put our convictions into words, some things slip out,” the main protagonist notes at one point. “If we pursue what’s correct too much, we eventually stop being able to forgive people. And when that’s aggravated, we start hating those close to us, and by the time we realize, it’s too late to go back to how

things were before.” The play offered a quietly dissenting view on society today, where assertions clash so stridently.

Encounters with the Dead. Listening to Their Voices.

Written and directed by Noda Hideki, NODA MAP’s production of *Fakespeare (Feikusupia)* listened to the words of the dead. Set at the sacred Mount Osore, the play layered together various images from Shakespeare’s tragedies, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *The Little Prince*, and other sources, which converged toward a search for “words.”

Malice running rampant online. Acrimony. Fake news. Conspiracy theories. Noda closed his play with actual words that were the polar opposite of these: the voices stored on the flight recorder recovered from the Japan Airlines plane that crashed in summer 1985. The words of the pilots doing their utmost to keep their plane in the air were brought back to life through the body of an actor, making an overwhelming impact on the audience. “Raise the head,” the phrase repeatedly said by the captain as he attempted to steer the plane after he had lost control of it, was powerfully moving, resonating like a poignant exhortation urging those left behind to live.

Five years have passed since the director Ninagawa Yukio died. Various initiatives that he engaged in at Saitama Arts Theater, where he served as artistic director, came to an end. The project begun in 1998 to stage all thirty-seven of Shakespeare’s plays was finally completed (strictly speaking, the production of *King John* planned for 2020 was postponed and remains unperformed). Matsuoka Kazuko became the third Japanese person, and the first Japanese woman, to translate all the plays. The final play was *All’s Well That Ends Well*. Taking over directing duties from Ninagawa, Yoshida Kotaro carefully articulated the relationships of the female characters, and brought the series to a joyous close. Saitama Next Theatre, which started as a training company for young actors yet to make a name for themselves, disbanded after the August production of *Rain Flower Beasts (Uka no kemono)*, a new play written by Hosokawa Yohei and directed by Iwamatsu Ryo. Likewise, Saitama Gold Theater, a performing group for senior citizens, staged its final production in December, a revival of Ota

Shogo's *The Water Station* (*Mizu no eki*) directed by Sugihara Kunio. In the former members of Saitama Next Theatre who have gone on to appear in other productions since the company disbanded, we can sense the spirit of Ninagawa continuing to live and breathe. Truly the theatre is a place where we are able to reunite with the dead.

Diverse Productions and Rich Harvests

The year saw other new plays. Keralino Sandrovich directed his own stage adaptation of the Abe Kobo novel *The Woman in the Dunes* (*Suna no onna*) with KEMURI Theatrical Laboratory, the group he formed with actor Ogawa Tamaki. He turned the tale of a woman and man living in a place shut off from the rest of the world by sand into an impressive drama. Now in its fortieth year, Gekidan Tobiraza's *Dissecting Green Tea Hag* (*Kaitai Aocha Baba*), deftly written and directed by Yokouchi Kensuke, turned the spotlight on the titular woman who unknowingly contributed greatly to *New Text on Anatomy* (*Kaitai shinsho*), an influential anatomy book translated into Japanese from a Dutch source. Team Saru, led by the actor Sasaki Kuranosuke, staged *A Virtuous Man without Friends—Emperor Yongzheng, the Loneliest "Tyrant" in Chinese History* (*Kunshi ni tomo nashi—Chugokushijo mottomo kodoku na "bokun" Yoseitei*), a strikingly unusual play about the eighteenth-century Chinese Qing-dynasty emperor Yongzheng, written by Abe Nobuhide and directed by Higashi Kenji. Yongzheng's approach as a ruler probed deep into contemporary Japan. Due to the large scale of its productions, Gekidan Shinkansen was severely impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, but the company showed us how robust it still is with its first major play in two and a half years, *Kitsune Seimei Kyubigari*, written by Nakashima Kazuki and directed by Inoue Hidenori.

At the New National Theatre, Tokyo, artistic director Ogawa Eriko's Full Audition Project and KOTSU-KOTSU Project started to bear fruit. For the former, in which productions are cast slowly by directors through open calls, three productions were staged: *Slashed Senta* (*Kirare no Senta*), written by Miyoshi Juro and directed by Kamimura Satoshi; *Reaction Process* (*Hanno kotei*), written by Miyamoto Ken and directed by Chiba Tetsuya (postponed to this

year after its cancellation in 2020); and *Fade (Iroaseru)*, written and directed by Kuramochi Yutaka. For the KOTSU-KOTSU Project, which gradually tackles scripts over the course of more than year through rehearsals and work-in-progress performances, Nishizawa Eiji directed Betsuyaku Minoru's *Bubbling and Boiling (Aabukutatta, niitatta)*.

The Full Audition Project brings together directors and actors, and has sometimes led to actors performing in productions at other theatres. Albeit unspectacular, it is a befitting initiative for a national theatre that enriches the foundation of the theatre world in Japan. Originally written by Kuramochi for the New National Theatre, Tokyo ten years ago and here revived in a production directed by the author, *Fade* had become more vivid and compelling in the interim, and felt almost prophetic when watched now in the age of social media. Among other notable productions at the New National Theatre, Tokyo during the year, the revival of Inoue Hisashi's *Final Take: The Golden Age of Movies (Kinema no tenchi)* directed by Ogawa was particularly accomplished.

At Kanagawa Arts Theatre, newly appointed artistic director Nagatsuka Keishi directed *The Osho Trilogy* by Hojo Hideji in a theatre space temporarily erected in the atrium. All three parts were staged in succession at weekends, forming just under six hours packed with the joy of watching a play.

Among productions of overseas plays in translation, Wajdi Mouawad's *Forests (Forets)* at Setagaya Public Theatre was astonishing. The third in the Mouawad's *The Blood of Promises* quartet that the theatre is gradually staging, it was an epic play portraying 150 years in the history of a family, interwoven with the international circumstances at the time and supernatural powers. Kamimura Satoshi's directing and the performances by the likes of Asami Rei, Okamoto Kenichi, Songha, Kurita Momoko, and Kameda Yoshiaki were especially vivid.

Parco Theater's daring programming excelled. The contemporary British play *The Doctor* by Robert Icke was staged by director Kuriyama Tamiya with Otake Shinobu in the lead role of a physician who comes face to face with an array of issues, from race to creed, class, and gender, spelled out in densely packed dialogue exchanges. It was a production that left a strong sense of theatre's significance as a place for thought-provoking experiences. Mori Shintaro's

all-female staging of *Julius Caesar* lucidly conveyed the political struggles of men.

Haiyuza staged ambitious productions of *The Just Assassins* (*Les Justes*), written by Albert Camus and directed by Ogasawara Kyo, and *Ink*, with Manabe Takashi directing the James Graham play about the British media.

The young Bungakuza director Inaba Kae made a conspicuous impression during the year. She displayed her assured abilities in the Office Cottone production of *The Unburied Dead* (*Morts sans sépulture*) by Jean-Paul Sartre and *The Mother* (*Matka*) by Karel Čapek, and then revived *The Atami Murder Case* (*Atami satsujin jiken*) for Bungakuza Atelier no Kai, shining new light on this Tsuka Kohei play that originally premiered at Bungakuza in 1973.

Determination in the Face of Difficulty

The ongoing difficulties posed by the coronavirus pandemic on international travel had a great impact on theatre in Japan during the year, not least the cancellation of Le Théâtre du Soleil's visit from France, which was meant to be one of the main draws of Tokyo Festival 2021.

Nevertheless, people did not give up, and found ways to keep international exchange going, such as artists visiting Japan by undertaking the necessary quarantine period or making use of technology to allow them to participate remotely.

The year also marked two decades of efforts by the Japan-Korea Theatre Communications Center and Association of Korea-Japan Theater Exchange to translate and hold stage readings of Japanese and South Korean plays. To date, fifty plays have been translated in both languages. At the symposium held in Tokyo in January, the members of the Korean theatre world who participated remotely offered constructive proposals for how we can confront things in the future through theatre.

The pandemic notwithstanding, the general director of Matsumoto Performing Arts Centre, Kushida Kazuyoshi, launched FESTA Matsumoto in October in the eponymous city in Nagano Prefecture. In addition to formal theatre spaces, the festival featured a wide range of theatre, dance, music, and more in such places around the city as cafes and a park.

In his statement to mark the opening of the festival, Kushida wrote: "A

festival is by no means something that takes place only at times of social peace and prosperity. Rather, it is something that takes place when humankind experiences terrible misfortune as a prayer that life may return to normal again and in order to help us maintain our spiritual well-being, and so that the human race may find ways of living and behaving for the future. This is the true role of a festival.” Shrouded in the dark fog of the pandemic, here was a resolute declaration that held up a torch to light the way.

Yamaguchi, Hiroko

Reporter for the *Asahi Shimbun*. Born in 1960, she joined the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper in 1983. Over the course of her career, she has worked at its Tokyo, West Japan (Fukuoka), and Osaka offices as a reviewer and reporter for cultural news, especially theatre. She has previously served on the paper’s editorial board and as a culture and media editorialist. She also teaches part-time at Musashino Art University and Nihon University. She is the co-author of *Ninagawa Yukio’s Work* (Shinchosha, 2015).

(Translation: William Andrews)

Children's and Youth Theatre

A Year of Pondering How to Create Encounters with Children amid the Pandemic

Ota Akira

Holding the ASSITEJ World Congress

When all is said and done, the biggest topic for us in 2021 was the 20th ASSITEJ World Congress in Tokyo and International Performing Arts Festival for Children and Young People / MIRAI 2020. A triennial global festival for artists working in the field of theatre for children and young people, the ASSITEJ World Congress was due to take place in Tokyo in May 2020 but had to be postponed until March 2021 because of COVID-19. As it was impossible to bring productions and guests from overseas to Japan, we switched to a hybrid model blending physical and virtual participation, and, miraculously, managed to hold the event from March 20 to 31, 2021 in Tokyo and Nagano, at a time when there was no state of emergency in effect.

We received 1,254 applications from across the globe for productions to be featured, from which we selected 26 international and 5 Japanese productions. A total of 110 domestic and international productions had been due to feature in the fringe program, but ultimately this was scaled back to 66, with 20 from overseas and 46 from within Japan. The international fringe productions were presented in video form, with screenings followed by a talk session in real time via remote link between the festival venue and the countries concerned. The Japanese fringe productions were performed before an in-person audience, with the number of seats available kept below half of each theatre's capacity.

Because many of the meetings during the festival took the form of international symposia, almost all were held online, but we did take care to provide opportunities throughout the festival for those who had come to the venue in

person to get together and chat face to face. We also devised ways to provide children with a sample of the global atmosphere, in an effort to motivate people involved in culture and the arts to keep striving to offer children encounters with the stage and to not give up on the future of culture.

First, I would like to introduce some of the Japanese productions featured. While Opera Theater Konnyakuza's *Konnyakuza Concert (Konnyakuza no ongakukai)* took the form of a simple concert of songs and piano music, its dramatic staging and the unerring vocal skills on display ensured it entertained people of all ages. ROBA Music Theatre's *Welcome to the Land of Musical Instruments (Gakki no kuni e yokoso)* featured everything from period instruments to unique new ones, the story unfolding through a performance in which a variety of sounds reached the audience in an entirely natural way. It was wonderful to observe the children gradually become enthralled. *KOYO Mime Live* by Pantomime Unit TORIO offered not only a highly skilled demonstration of mime, but also novelty in its diverse range of modes of expression, including ventriloquism with the aid of items made from paper, sketches using everyday items such as newspapers and paper bags, dances in which the artist performed two roles, and magic tricks. Also striking was the sight of children and their parents enjoying the heartwarming clown performances in La Strada Company's *The Circus Lights (Sakasu no hi)*, a nonverbal production underpinned by outstanding artistry on a stage set made from Japanese *washi* paper. Meanwhile, the Kamijo Mitsuru-led Edo Marionette Group showcased puppets with a history dating back 380 years. As these marionettes depicted drunken men, the graceful movements of beautiful kimono-clad women, and comical dances passed down through the generations since the seventeenth century, they brought Japanese history and folk culture to life.

The 2021 ASSITEJ World Congress marked the first time that international productions had been screened on video. In an attempt to replicate the live experience to some small extent, we organized after-show talks with the performers and directors of each production via remote link, which proved popular with participants. Many of the videos we screened had been filmed in front of an audience of children, so being able to appreciate their reactions helped to enhance the

global aspect of this event, I believe.

Another reason why our audiences were so forthcoming in their approbation for the 2021 ASSITEJ World Congress was the large number of nonverbal productions across a wide assortment of genres. Due in part to the fact that the event took place during the spring holiday, we finally began to see children sitting in the audience again. Most notably, thanks to the proactive inclusion of our Nagano performances in the school holiday programs organized by local government bodies, there were many family groups in the audience. We truly felt that this was a festival for children.

As we marked the milestone of the 20th ASSITEJ World Congress, we had hoped to welcome children's and youth theatre artists from across the globe to Japan. Although we were unfortunately unable to meet in person in the end, we were at least able to encounter each other through this hybrid event, drawing upon each artist's ideas. And I do hope the day will come when we can enjoy in Japan the productions we were unable to physically stage this year. Finally, we were delighted that the ASSITEJ World Congress won the Digital Transformation: From Offline to Online category in the Culture Online International Award, which is organized by the Russian Cultural Foundation in partnership with the Saint Petersburg International Cultural Forum (SPICF).

076

Support from the Agency for Cultural Affairs amid the Pandemic

2021 was the year in which we became keenly aware of just how great the impact of COVID-19 was. Tokyo spent around seven of the nine months between January and September 2021 under a state of emergency. As had been the case the previous year, there was a sharp decline in the number of performances at nursery schools, kindergartens, and schools until the summer break, due to the prolonged state of emergency. During this situation, the Agency for Cultural Affairs and several other ministries and agencies introduced support measures in their supplementary budgets for cultural and artistic activities aimed at children and young people.

Performances at schools and the like are usually carried out on the basis of direct contracts between schools and the theatre companies or creative groups

concerned. Accordingly, when performances were canceled due to the pandemic last year, most were halted or postponed without a cancellation fee being paid in recompense. In contrast, cancellation fees or equivalent measures were introduced for performances as part of projects implemented by the Agency for Cultural Affairs and other government bodies, ensuring that schools, and theatre companies/creative groups alike could make arrangements with peace of mind. A number of examples are outlined below.

The Agency for Cultural Affairs project entitled Supporting Opportunities for Children to Appreciate and Experience Culture encompasses three approaches: the program selection approach, under which schools can choose from a menu of children's plays, music, traditional performing arts (Noh plays), and programs put together by groups working in the field of new media art to suit the school's own art appreciation projects; the school-initiated approach, under which schools can choose artists, arts organizations, and works from a wider range of fields; and the cultural facilities approach.

The key difference from earlier initiatives is the availability of the school-initiated approach, giving theatre companies/creative groups and schools the freedom to liaise directly in making arrangements for performances, as they had done before. Previously, when performances were staged at schools and similar institutions with grants from the Agency for Cultural Affairs or other government bodies, the schools had to choose from a limited number of preselected works. The introduction of the school-initiated approach was groundbreaking in that it gave schools the right to choose from all kinds of different works.

The Supporting Opportunities for Children to Appreciate and Experience Culture at Theatres and Concert Halls project subsidizes some of the seats at performances for the general public so that free tickets can be provided to children eighteen and under. However, the requirement for this subsidy is that the tickets (or where there are several price points, the ticket price for the most expensive seat) must cost at least eight thousand yen, so one would have to say that most of these performances do not fall into the category of performing arts for children and youth.

Furthermore, while this project targets all children eighteen and under, the

project is aimed at elementary and junior high schools only. In other words, support for theatre companies/creative groups and artists that have specialized in performing arts for children focuses solely on performances aimed at elementary and junior high school students, whereas support for performances not principally targeted at children covers all children from infants up to eighteen-year-olds. Defining children as elementary and junior high school students in some cases and all those eighteen and under in others gives rise to an ineluctable impression of inconsistency, not to mention unfairness. As performances at nursery schools, kindergartens, and high schools are important to most children's and youth theatre companies/creative groups, significant misgivings remained about the lack of support for children in those age brackets.

Nevertheless, under another Agency for Cultural Affairs project, the Art Caravan—a scheme focused on large-scale, high-quality art and cultural activities—offered nationwide performances by umbrella organizations in ten artistic fields. In addition, the Japan Association of Theatre for Children and Young People organized the Shadow Play Festival, in which three Japanese shadow puppetry companies toured the length and breadth of the country giving performances. Meanwhile, under the Agency for Cultural Affairs' ARTS for the Future program, which sought to overcome the effects of the pandemic through support for efforts to enhance cultural and artistic activities, many children's and youth theatre companies with little experience performing for the general public used the opportunity to organize such performances.

However, anxiety lingers about the prospects for the coming fiscal year. As artists are unable to visit schools and the like to engage in marketing activities and schools are still uncertain about concluding direct contracts for performances, theatre companies and creative groups continue to suffer.

New Productions in 2021

Just like 2020, 2021 was a tough year, but quite a few theatre companies and creative groups managed to stage new productions. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce four that particularly caught my interest.

Theater Genosse's *The Forest of Lost Things* (*Wasuremono no mori*) (written

by Okada Jun and Urakawa Ryoji, and adapted and directed by Matsuda Tamaki) is a new piece staged after a year's delay, having been in rehearsal in 2020 when COVID-19 struck. It pulled off the feat of being a production that adults could also enjoy, without losing any of the original book's perspective on the world.

Bringing together a diverse array of artists, Studio Eggs's *KAKERU! The Product ... of KATE (Food) and GAKE (Precipice) and KAKE (Gambling)?! (KAKERU! kate to gake to kake ... no hate?)* (written and directed by Nagai Kanko) was a veritable treasure trove of performances.

Tokyo Engeki Ensemble's *Bear in the Universe (Uchu no naka no kuma; Bär im Universum)* (written by Dea Loher, translated by Miwa Reiko, and directed by Koke Yoshinori) was the Japanese premiere of the first children's play by Dea Loher, one of Germany's foremost contemporary playwrights. The piece tackles the universal topic of accepting each other's differences, against the background of environmental problems.

Kazenoko-Kyushu Theatre Company's *The Diary Library: Living Life as Myself* (written by Mizutani Akane, and adapted and directed by Asano Yumiko) was jointly created with junior and senior high school students in Kagoshima. Based on the real-life diary of a trainee on the Naval Aviator Preparatory Course during World War II, this play links the past with the present as it explores peace.

While there were many other new productions by theatre companies and creative groups, space constraints preclude my mentioning them all. The pandemic's impact has been immense and profound, and I am sure that rebuilding this field will take a great deal of time. It goes without saying that, in doing so, continuing efforts to explore new creative activities, and public support for children's and youth performing arts will be essential. Having encountered an array of initiatives from across the globe and watched many children engaging with the performing arts at the ASSITEJ World Congress, I gained a renewed awareness of the distinctiveness and quality of Japanese children's and youth theatre productions and the environment around them. I remain hopeful that 2022 will bring forth a few green shoots of recovery and the whisper of a fresh breeze through the world of children's and youth theatre.

Ota, Akira

Since joining Tokyo Engeki Ensemble in 1996, he has produced most of the company's productions. He has given many lectures and workshops as the director in charge of developing human resources at Japan Union of Theatrical Companies for Children and Young People. In 2004, he studied at the youth theatre department (Unga Riks) of Sweden's National Touring Theatre (Riksteatern) for a short period under the Agency for Cultural Affairs Program of Overseas Study for Upcoming Artists. Among his other positions, he is currently the Secretary-General of the Japan-Korea Theater Communications Center.

(Translation: Eleanor Goldsmith)

Performances That Shone in the Midst of the Covid Pandemic

Hirano Hidetoshi

In the midst of the pandemic that began in 2020, for the first few months of 2021, as measures were taken to suppress the spread of COVID-19, theatres were opening. However, when the government declared a state of emergency on April 23, things changed totally.

On April 25, the National Theatre (Large Theatre) was rented out as the venue for the *Nishikawa Kai*, a recital of Japanese classical dance sponsored by Nishikawa Senzo. Since I didn't hear anything from the sponsor and because it was produced by Nishikawa Senzo and not the National Theatre itself, I assumed that it would go on as scheduled and went to the theatre. But instead, I was handed a message at the front door of the theatre from Nishikawa Senzo's son, Nishikawa Minosuke. The message read:

"On the evening of April 23, the government announced the state of emergency. The National Theatre informed us that the only way the recital could be held was if there was no audience. "For that reason, we decided that the *Nishikawa Kai* scheduled for April 25 would have to be canceled. Yesterday we contacted as many people as we could by telephone and fax, but we were unable to contact everybody. I am deeply sorry that this meant that you had to come all the way to the theatre today."

For about a month after that, many performances of Japanese classical dance were either canceled or postponed.

1. The Efforts of Four Dancers during the Pandemic

In the world of Japanese classical dance in 2020, new experiments using technology such as online streaming received a lot of attention. In 2021, online streaming of Japanese classical dance became even more widespread, but ultimately, as a stage art, Japanese classical dance is only complete when it is performed in person with a live audience. In 2021, even though performances in front of live audiences tended to be more infrequent, by autumn there were several live performances of Japanese classical dance, including many very fine performances. These performances may have been held on a relatively small scale, but they were a sign of energy created in resistance to all the restrictions caused by the pandemic. I would like to introduce works performed by four dancers.

082 First is Hanayagi Shue's performance of *Kato-Bushi Dojoji* (*The Ghost of a Woman in Love at Dojoji Temple to Kato-Bushi Music*) choreographed by Hanayagi Toshinami. In the *Shue no Kai: Koten ni Yoseru Ima no Omoi* (*Thoughts and Feelings about the Classics in the Present Moment*) (November 18, Kioi Small Hall), this was the most memorable piece. This was originally choreographed by Shue's teacher, the late Hanayagi Toshinami, and showcased Toshinami's character with her small body and warm and genial presence. By contrast, Shue is slim and used the characteristics of her own body to express the theme of the dance with sharp and precise movements. It was very moving to see her deepen the expression of the world that her teacher created. It was a rare opportunity to actually see the process by which a dance is both transmitted to the next generation and simultaneously grows and evolves.

Next I would like to focus on Ichiyama Shosen's activity through the year. I saw two performances: *Commemorating the 55th Shusen Kai* (July 17, Nihonbashi Gekijo), in which he danced to the nagauta piece *Urashima*, and the *5th Keika no Kai* (November 8, Cerulean Tower Noh Theatre), where he danced the role of the boatman in the nagauta piece *Shizuhata Obi* (*The Madwoman in the Boat*). In these performances, I confirmed my view that in recent years, his art has become solid and mature.

The dance group "Ko no Kai," which has been represented by Shosen for over 20 years, was also very active, and their representative piece *Onbashira*,

about the dynamic festival in Nagano prefecture where a massive log is slid down a mountain, has been performed many times—one of the most frequently performed new pieces of recent years. This year, it was performed in several venues including: in February at the Yonago Public Hall in Tottori prefecture; in March at the Uonuma City, Niigata prefecture Koidego Cultural Hall; in May at the Rexam Hall in Takamatsu, Kagawa prefecture and the Aubade Hall in Toyama prefecture; in August at the National Theatre in Tokyo (more about this performance below); and in December at the Maizuru City General Cultural Center in Kyoto prefecture, Cosmo Hall in Anan City, Tokushima prefecture, Mihara Performing Arts Center ‘POPOLO’ in Hiroshima prefecture, and the Yamaguchi Prefectural Theater Renaisa Nagato.

And I would like to mention performances of two works that I have introduced in this space before, but these were very meaningful performances. One is Bando Mitsuteru’s original dance *Clone—Dark Sounds* (9th Mitsuteru no Kai, September 20, National Theatre (Large Theatre)), lyrics and choreography by Bando Mitsuteru, musical composition by Nakajima Katsusuke, percussion and sound effects composed by Mochizuki Saburo, choreography by Takeya Keiko, design by Taki Zenko, and lighting by Hara Masao. The other is Fujima Kiyotsugu’s original dance *Futari Shizuka* (*The Two Shizukas*) (*Hana Tsugu Kai Tokyo Koen Fujima Kiyotsugu Buyo Recital*, November 5, Kioi Small Hall), scripted by Shibasaki Yoichi, music composed by Kineya Katsumatsu, percussion and sound effects composed by Nakai Akira, koto music composed by Uehara Masateru, and choreography by Sato Hiroki and Fujima Kiyotsugu.

For me, what was most important about these two pieces is that by juxtaposing Japanese classical dance and other genres, they brought the distinctive use of the body in Japanese classical dance into clear focus. Mitsuteru’s dance was first performed over twenty years ago, long before the COVID-19 pandemic, but it captured the mood of the current pandemic: the terror of not knowing what will happen next, the fear that despite all the advances in science, the incapacity of the human race to fight off this threat. The figure of Mitsuteru expressing these emotions was unforgettable. *Futari Shizuka* was inspired by a Noh play about the Shizuka Gozen, the lover of the medieval tragic hero Minamoto no Yoshitsune,

and how her spirit possessed an ordinary local woman and they danced together, describing Shizuka's torment in parting from Yoshitsune as he fled from the wrath of his older brother Yoritomo, the head of the Genji clan and the ruler of Japan. In Kiyotsugu's version of this story, the spirit of Shizuka was played by flamenco dancer Kagita Mayumi who debuted in early Showa Japan and appeared to a woman played by Kiyotsugu performing as an *onnagata* (female role specialist) as a woman making a pilgrimage around Japan to pray for the soul of a child that she was forced to abort. The spirit of Shizuka comes and possesses this woman. The last time it was performed was in the National Theatre (Small Theatre); this time it was performed in the Kioi Small Hall, and since the stage space was smaller, the theme of the competition of the use of the body in flamenco and in Japanese classical dance came across more clearly and with even more impact.

2. The Nucleus of Japanese Classical Dance—The Dancer's Body

084

I encountered a piece of music I found very inspiring in thinking about how Japanese can use their bodies expressively in the present time. It was contemporary music composer Kaneko Hitomi's *Chikyu—Seimei (La vie de notre planète): Music Based on a 3D Model VII—For an Ensemble of Japanese Traditional Instruments* (Dai 3 Kai Gendai Hogaku "Ko" [Third Contemporary Music for Japanese Traditional Instruments Concert], November 9, Recital Hall of the Tokyo Bunka Kaikan). This is what the composer wrote in the program: "Many Japanese traditional instruments retain the construction of the past and make good use of the qualities of the natural materials that they are made of. Because of that, just one note has the bewitching capacity to draw us into their unique world. These instruments don't have all the mechanisms of Western musical instruments that have undergone all kinds of improvements over the ages and because of their construction, I feel that Japanese traditional instruments blend into the natural world totally. ... In my mind, Japanese traditional instruments are overlapped with things that are elemental, things like the laws of nature." The ensemble of 18 musicians playing Japanese traditional instruments—koto, the three-stringed *sangen* (the name for the shamisen in the context of koto music), and

shakuhachi flute—did not just play melodies, they would play patterns that sometimes echoed each other sequentially and sometimes blended together. The piece unfolded like the flow of water or the flow of time. This was none other than what the composer described as “things that are elemental, things like the laws of nature.” It was the music of the life of the globe equaling the structure of water. I think that this use of Japanese traditional instruments can be transferred to the use of the body in Japanese classical dance and connect to the future of the art.

At the performance, sponsored by the National Theatre, of *Nihon Buyo no Susume (Opening the Door to Traditional Japanese Dance)* (August 1, National Theatre (Large Theatre)), there was an introductory explanation titled *Nihon Buyo x Dance: Odoru Karada (Japanese Classical Dance x Dance: The Dancing Body)*. It featured Kondo Ryohei and Ishibuchi Satoshi, two members of Condors, a group that has been instrumental in contemporary dance in Japan. Japanese classical dancer Nishikawa Senyoichi was the guide and demonstrated how contemporary dance was characterized by free physical expression while Japanese classical dance emphasized traditional movements and forms of expression. I believe that this presentation was unprecedented in Japan. The performance itself featured the aforementioned *Onbashira* by the Japanese classical Dance Group Ko no Kai and the classical nagauta dance *Renjishi (Father and Son Lion Dance)* with Wakayagi Kichizo as the father *shishi* and Hanayagi Genkuro as the child *shishi*. By pairing these two dances, the performance showed the creative energy in *Onbashira* that aimed at escaping the restrictions of tradition and approaching contemporary dance alongside the firm technique of the tradition of dances featuring *shishi* in Edo period kabuki, which in turn is part of the long tradition of what is known as “The Lion Dance.” In this performance as well, by comparing the use of the body in Japanese classical dance and in contemporary dance, it clearly brought out the characteristics of the use of the body in Japanese classical dance.

3. *Onnagata* in Japanese Classical Dance

In order to get a firm grasp of the Japanese use of the body onstage, it's necessary to look at a technique that transcends gender: *onnagata*, or the art of a man

playing a female character. The technique of *onnagata* in Japanese classical dance is based on the techniques of portraying female characters in Noh, and even more closely on *onnagata* in kabuki, but I believe that Japanese classical dance has found new ways to develop it.

Showing that he would not be defeated by COVID-19, one of the first to return to the theatres was Umewaka Kanjiro with his performance of the nagauta piece *Shinpa Ebanzuke (An Illustrated Program of Shinpa)* (Umewaka Kai, May 26, National Theatre (Large Theatre)) which examined the theme of shinpa (New School Theater), a melodramatic form of drama that flourished in the Meiji, Taisho, and early Showa periods and showed the clash of the modern and traditional worlds. At first, all female roles in shinpa were played by *onnagata*, but eventually shinpa had both *onnagata* and actresses, often with *onnagata* playing geisha, entertainers, and other characters from the traditional world. Kanjiro created his own world of *onnagata* different from kabuki *onnagata* and evoked the feeling of shinpa *onnagata*. He appeared as a woman in a white kimono and portrayed female characters from famous shinpa plays like Izumi Kyoka's *Nihonbashi* and *Onna Keizu (The Genealogy of a Woman)*, and Kawaguchi Matsutaro's *Furyu Fukagawa Uta (A Fashionable Song of Fukagawa)*. These figures embodied the mood of the lyrics, "And now, the Showa period has become part of the distant past."

086

Also, the aforementioned Fujima Kiyotsugu started his *Buyo Onnagata no Kai (Japanese Classical Dance Onnagata Recital)* (December 5, Kioi Small Hall). In the program, he stated that his aim was to, "ensure the transmission of the art of *onnagata*, which has been neglected in recent years, and to reexamine and study Japanese classical dance works that feature *onnagata*." The performance featured kabuki *onnagata* Nakamura Kyotae and Onoe Midori, and as Japanese classical dancers who perform *onnagata*, Fujima Kiyotsugu and Fujima Taichi performed one dance each. Kyotae performed the Kiyomoto piece *Yamanba (The Mountain Hag)*, showing that he learned well from his teacher, the late kabuki *onnagata* Nakamura Jakuemon IV. While being a kabuki *onnagata*, Jakuemon had something of the feeling of a shinpa *onnagata*, and Kyotae carries on this tradition. Showing the art of a shinpa *onnagata*, Kiyotsugu performed a dance

that he choreographed himself, *Yozakura Shibai Banashi* (*The Cherry Blossoms at Night: Stories of the Theater*). Taichi performed the classic *Musume Dojoji* (*The Girl at Dojoji Temple*) in the unique Japanese classical dance style of *su odori*, that is, without stage set, costume, or wig, just a formal kimono. Midori also performed *su odori* for something a little different from the usual kabuki *onnagata* with the nagauta dance, *Matsukaze*. They each showed their own different appeal and the appeal of these different styles of *onnagata*. It was a very enjoyable performance, and I look forward to seeing how this will develop in the future.

4. Performances of Japanese Classical Dance

Sponsored by the National Theatre and the Buyo Kyokai (Japanese Classical Dance Association)

In addition to *Nihon Buyo no Susume* discussed above, programs sponsored by the National Theatre included one focusing on one of the main pillars of Japanese classical dance (*su odori*) in the *Su Odori no Sekai—Nihon Buyo no Giho o Shiru* (*The World of Su Odori—Learn About the Techniques of Traditional Japanese Dance*) (March 13, National Theatre (Small Theatre)), and to commemorate the 55th anniversary of the opening of the National Theatre, *Mai no Kai—Keihan no Zashiki Mai* (*Traditional Kyoto-Osaka Dance*). These two programs could be said to focus on two of the fundamental elements of Japanese classical dance.

The program of *su odori* was titled *Furi to Byosha Gaisetsu—Ugoki to Imi* (*Lecture: Choreography and Depiction*). It featured an explanatory talk by Fujima Ranko and Fujima Ransho, illustrated with movements. Then there were performances of the tomeiryu dance *Miyakodori* (*Capital Birds*) (choreography by the late Fujima Fujiko) by Ranko, the nagauta piece *Azuma Hakkei* (*Eight Beautiful Views of Edo*) by Fujikage Shizue, and the kiyomoto piece *Kashiwa no Wakaba* (*Fresh Oak Leaves*) by Onoe Bokusetsu.

With the *Mai no Kai*, the one-day program was divided into three parts with four pieces in each section, one dance fewer than the usual program. Perhaps this was one of the reasons that there was a notable number of empty seats. In any case, this is worrisome for the future of this genre. It is a good thing that there were more young performers, but this also meant a drop in the depth and power

of the performances. The National Theatre will have to work hard to train successors to the leaders of the world of *mai*, Inoue Yachiyo and Yamamura Tomogoro. I felt the importance of the role that the National Theatre can play in this process. Also, one of the features of this performance is that the set evokes an elegant banquet room in the geisha districts of Kyoto and Osaka. But in this performance, the dances *Chidori* (*Plovers*) and *Higaki* (*The Woven Reed Enclosure*) were performed on a bare stage. This increased the dramatic effect of the dances but departed from the original meaning of preserving the atmosphere of the banquet chamber. This is something that must be considered seriously in the future.

The Buyo Kyokai thought carefully about how to approach its art during the pandemic. First, it canceled the annual program featuring veteran and younger dancers from a wide variety of schools and instead held a *Tokubetsu Nihon Buyo Koen—Inori Kibo Soshite Kansha o Komete* (*Special Japanese Classical Dance Performance—With Prayers and Hope for the Future and Also Gratitude*) (March 4, National Noh Theatre). Responding to the uncertain atmosphere created by the pandemic, this performance consisted of two programs, matinee and evening, with three dances in each program, performed on a Noh stage. Performers and audience alike joined in the wish for an end to the pandemic.

The performance of the original dance *Yume Ou Ko* (*A Child Chasing Dreams*) was delayed for a year due to the pandemic, but finally took place from June 4–6 in the National Theatre (Small Theatre). I described the NHK documentary on the making of the dance in last year's Yearbook, so I will not discuss this in detail here, but it was a dance introducing elements of contemporary dance in Japanese classical dance and showed the process from the birth of a child until he grows up to compete to be the best in the world in the Olympics. It was a worthy effort, but the group dances lacked fresh inspiration.

The Buyo Kyokai also sponsored a new kind of performance, *Todoke Ashita e Mirai e Tsunagu Nihon Buyo Koen* (*Connect! A Performance of Japanese Classical Dance That Connects to the Future*) (October 16, National Theatre (Small Theatre) in Tokyo; December 3, National Bunraku Theatre in Osaka). It featured the dance *Nostalgia Fragile for Koto Ensemble* (composed by Hiyamizu Noel, choreography by Hanayagi Kiyohito) and the *biwa* lute piece *Yoichi no Dan* (*The Tale of the*

Archer Nasu no Yoichi) (by Umezu Katsuichiro, composed by Handa Junko, flute and percussion composed by Tosha Rosen, choreography by Onoe Bokusetsu). This performance had many hints for future directions for the Association.

5. Topics

On July 26, for the first time there were Living National Treasures from the field of *Ryukyu Buyo*, with the designation of Miyagi Sachiko and Shida Fusako. The 2020 Art Encouragement Prize for New Artists went to Ichikawa Suisen, and the Grand Prize in the Agency for Cultural Affairs National Arts Festival in the field of Japanese Classical Dance went to Fujima Kiyotsugu for his achievements in the *Fujima Kiyotsugu Recital*.

Hirano, Hidetoshi

Nihon buyo (Japanese classical dance) critic. Born in 1944 in Sendai and graduated from the theatre division of the literature department of Waseda University majoring in kabuki. Worked for a publishing house as an editor for such periodicals as *Okinawa Performing Arts*, the quarterly journal *Folk Performing Arts*, and the monthly magazine, *Japanese Music and Classical Dance*. To explore the art of physical expression, he became a critic and is a member of advisory committees for institutions including the Japanese Cultural Agency and the Society for the Advancement of the Arts in Japan. In 2016, his book *Critique: History of Japanese Physical Expression—Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Nihon Buyo-sha) was published.

(Translation: Mark Oshima)

Ballet

Edging Back to Normality while Grappling with Covid Restrictions

Urawa Makoto

On/Off Restrictions Create Chaos in the Ballet Scene

This was the second year of the Pandemic, which continued to influence both the ballet world and society in general. Coming up to the May holiday season, the government asked the entertainment sector to put on their shows without an in-person audience, to limit travel. Then, there was a huge spike in Covid cases during the Olympic Games in July and August. Hospitals were under enormous strain. But when the vaccination program picked up speed in September, the number of cases went down drastically. We had very few Covid cases during November and December. People continued taking strict protective measures, but otherwise things began to return to normal. However, the new, highly infectious Omicron variant was rampant abroad by the end of November. The cold winter season has arrived, and we must remain cautious during the Christmas and New Year holidays.

I would like to summarize how the ballet world continued to present their works and how they coped with the ever-changing situation.

Although the government did not ask the entertainment sector to cancel events, as they did last year, we had to comply with tough restrictions, especially during the first half of the year. As I mentioned at the beginning, the government asked the entertainment sector to have no in-person audiences. Performing arts like ballet just do not work without an audience. So, in effect, the producers had no choice but to cancel or postpone their events. However, postponement was not realistic. It meant that they would have to rebook venues, which was very

problematic. And many of these productions involved several companies with their performers and staff members, as well as guest performers from Japan and abroad. As a result, many of them had to be canceled.

The government repeatedly declared a state of emergency or a quasi-state of emergency only to lift it again, meaning that companies could not always comply with audience restrictions. There were occasions when staff members or performers were infected by Covid, but there were no clusters in any ballet company.

I would like to talk in more detail about how ballet companies, who had never before performed without an audience, dealt with this new regulation between April 25 and May 11. Every year, various productions, showcases, and competitions are planned for this long holiday period. This year, many were canceled, and a few, including the Tokyo Ballet production, were postponed. However, some companies came up with their own solutions. They presented their work online instead of in person; the National Ballet of Japan streamed their performance, the Roland Petit version of *Coppelia*, featuring all the cast members. Others, including Ballet Piccolo, commemorating their sixtieth anniversary, decided not to stream their productions. They could not postpone the performance to the following year because it would reduce the significance of the anniversary, and some guest performers could not change their schedules. They felt it was more meaningful to commemorate the anniversary and hold a ceremony, even without an audience. Only six people were allowed in the seating area at their venue, Nerima Cultural Center. Technical staff members and cameramen were also admitted, but teachers and volunteers had to stay in the wings. There were strict rules for theatre venues, unlike the Olympic Games that were only nominally without an audience.

Another unusual example was Company Deco Boco, in Hyogo Prefecture. They were planning a production of *Coppelia* for April 25, the day restrictions were imposed. So, they decided to move the performance to the day before. They happened to have the venue booked for that day, and they were able to notify most of the audience. This was an unusual case. They gave another performance on the 25th, without an audience, and streamed it live.

Differing Responses by Companies and Regions

I would like to note the two main characteristics of the Japanese ballet scene before I talk more about what happened this year. First, most Japanese ballet companies are concentrated in the metropolitan areas, especially Tokyo. Second, no ballet company except for the National Ballet of Japan has their own theatre. They rely more heavily on their ballet school income than on performance income, donations, or grants. Income from these schools supports the companies and their dancers. In fact, dancers earn most of their income through teaching at ballet schools all over the country. This is the bedrock that supports the artform. Last year, the Agency for Cultural Affairs launched public support schemes like Art Caravan Projects and ARTS for the Future! But small- and mid-sized companies and schools had trouble qualifying for these schemes and were hard hit financially. Some dancers were forced out of business or had to change their profession.

092

Bearing all this in mind, let us look at the year region by region. Ballet companies based in metropolitan areas, especially Tokyo, had to limit capacity to fifty percent at one point, and they even had to perform without in-person audiences, but they managed to pick up momentum later in the year. The ballet companies in the Kansai region (for example in Osaka, Hyogo, and Kyoto) all coped in various ways up until now. In Nagoya, in central Japan, major companies have only recently resumed production. Nationwide, companies continue to take strict Covid measures such as mask-wearing, sanitizing, and taking temperatures and contact information from each audience member. Recordings replaced live music. No merchandise, food, or drinks were sold in the lobbies. So everything had been stripped down.

I would like to start with the metropolitan region of Tokyo. This was Yoshida Miyako's second year as artistic director of the National Ballet of Japan. Although the first half of the year was impacted by the pandemic, in October, she finally managed to present the Peter Wright version of *Swan Lake* that she had had to cancel the year before. *The Nutcracker* was presented from the end of December to the beginning of January; the first time a show bridged from one

year to the next since the opening of the theatre. The Tokyo Ballet was the most active of the private companies. After the new restrictions were announced, they postponed their May holiday production to June. They presented *HOPE JAPAN 2021* in July and *The Nutcracker* in December. They toured Japanese cities with these shows. Matsuyama Ballet lost their founder Matsuyama Mikiko to illness. The world-renowned dancer Morishita Yoko, who is in her mid-seventies, continued to play the central roles in all of the company's full-length productions. This year, she performed in *New Version Swan Lake* and in *Romeo and Juliet* in Tokyo, Osaka, Hiroshima, and Kyoto. In November, she played various roles in a production commemorating the seventieth anniversary of her dance career (scripted, directed, and choreographed by Shimizu Tetsutaro).

Asami Maki Ballet Tokyo also lost their founder Asami Maki, who had led the company for almost seventy years. In October, they presented Roland Petit's *Duke Ellington Ballet* and *L'Arlésienne* for the first time in sixteen years. As well as putting on their shows, this company runs several affiliated organizations that support young artists, which were active throughout the pandemic. K-Ballet Company, led by Kumakawa Tetsuya, had Iijima Nozomi from Heuston Ballet as a guest performer for their production *Don Quixote* (she joined the company in August as principal dancer). The company forged ahead steadily during the pandemic.

Tani Momoko Ballet, who marked their seventieth anniversary in 2020, the Inoue Ballet Foundation, Noriko Kobayashi Ballet Theatre, Tokyo City Ballet, Star Dancers Ballet, Ballet Chambre Ouest, NBA Ballet Company, and International Ballet Academia presented their work almost as usual while having a difficult time coping with Covid measures. The Japan Ballet Association, which supervises the ballet artists throughout the country, also went on with their projects as usual, including the triple bill *Ballet Création* and various competitions. And, Shinohara Seichi, who has presented some excellent work recently, revived his *Ananke*. The lead role was played by Shimomura Yurie, and the show was a huge success.

There is a recent trend among some midsized, established companies: Japanese ballet artists actively staging full-length productions without relying on

foreign artists. For example, Yamato City Ballet in Kanagawa Prefecture staged the Homan Naoya version of *Beauty and the Beast* at the end of 2020. During the summer season, they had five shows altogether, including small and medium productions, and in October, they presented *Tamamo-no-Mae*, choreographed by Ikegami Naoko based on a story by Okamoto Kido with the same title. These were all produced by Sasaki Mika. Iwaki Ballet Company staged the premiere of Takahashi Ryuta's *Tosca*. And this trend is not limited to Tokyo. BALLET NEXT in Nagoya did a revival of *A Dog of Flanders*, choreographed by Ichikawa Toru. A company in Okinawa called Tokoiriya, led by Midorima Ryoki, premiered *MIHAKASHI*, a piece based on *Kojiki (A Record of Ancient Matters)*, in Tokyo. They plan to do the same piece in Okinawa in 2022.

Sadamatsu-Hamada Ballet was the most prominent company in the three major prefectures in the Kansai region. In March, they staged three shows including Mori Yuki's new work *Toraware no kuni no Alice (Alice in Captive Wonderland)*. In the autumn, artistic director Sadamatsu Shoichiro presented a new version of *Le Corsaire*, acclaimed for its richness. Ballet Company West Japan, entering their third year, presented a triple bill of newly conceived productions. In Osaka, Homura Tomoi Ballet, Jinushi Ballet, Noma Ballet Company, and Sasaki Michiko Ballet Studio were all active throughout the year. In July, Horiuchi Gen, a former member of New York City Ballet and artistic director of St. Louis Ballet, staged *Ballet Future 2021* with prominent dancers from all over Japan. In Kyoto, Arima Ryuko Memorial Kyoto Ballet Company, who collaborate with Paris Opera Ballet every year, staged *Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake* with an all-Japanese cast.

The ballet scene in Nagoya is regaining its strength. Ochi International Ballet staged a revival of *Romeo and Juliet*. Matsuoka Reiko Ballet presented *Don Quixote* to commemorate the seventy-five years of Matsuoka Reiko's dance career. Midsized companies such as Sumina Okada Ballet School and Setsuko Kawaguchi Ballet also continued to present their work as they did the previous year.

In other regions, companies had a tough year. However, throughout the country, a lot of competitions were held as usual, integrating remote working and intro-

ducing video auditioning.

World Ballet Festival, held in August, had numerous foreign guest performers despite the harsh pandemic situation. *Ballet Muses 2021* and *Béjart Ballet Lausanne Japan Tour*, both held in October, were among other foreign productions.

The Fall of Two Giants

As I mentioned previously, two great dancers who built the foundation of ballet in our country passed away.

On May 22, Matsuyama Mikiko died at the age of ninety-eight. She founded Matsuyama Ballet with her husband Shimizu Masao. She performed in various productions and contributed to the restoration of diplomatic relations between Japan and China with the piece *Hakumajo (The White-Haired Girl)* during the 1950s and 1960s. Together with her son Shimizu Tetsutaro, she made Morishita Yoko one of the top dancers in the world. In 1946, the year after Japan surrendered and World War II ended, Matsuyama Ballet staged the first full production of *Swan Lake* in Japan. She was also one of the main board members of the Tokyo Ballet (not the current Tokyo Ballet), which was the pioneer ballet company in Japan. The other main members had all passed away, and she was the sole survivor. Her death marks the end of an era in ballet history.

On October 20, Maki Asami died at the age of eighty-seven. She was the daughter of Tachibana Akiko, the founder of Tachibana Ballet School, where many renowned Japanese ballet dancers trained. After studying with her mother and also under Alexandra Danilova in the US, she founded Asami Maki Ballet Tokyo. She was a dancer, choreographer, teacher, and company leader for over seventy years. She also contributed to the ballet scene in Japan as the artistic director of the dance sector of the New National Theatre and as the head of its ballet school. Despite battling illness, she did not stop working until the end. She was awarded the Order of Culture after her death, the first ballet artist to receive the honor.

Lastly, I would like to point out another important issue in our ballet world. It relates to the death of Fukagawa Hideo, who died last year. After his death, his family members and coworkers, together with some influential people, founded the organization Fukagawa Ballet Welt to continue the legacy of Fukagawa's artistic works. Their goal was to protect the copyright of his works while at the same time making them more available. We have so many world-standard productions and choreographers like Fukagawa in Japan, but these works can only be staged under the choreographers themselves and the rights are attached to them, so the works virtually disappear upon their death. No one inherits them, and there are no revivals. No one even thinks about treating the choreographic work as a "product" in itself. And there is no viable system that enables these established works to continue to be staged. Otsuka Reiko in Tokyo, Hara Mika in Kyoto, and Hatano Sumiko in Hyogo all revived Fukagawa's well-established short pieces this year. But nobody knows whether his works will continue to be staged or whether we will be able to pay tribute to our ballet choreographers and inherit their works as other countries do.

I hope that an organization like the New National Theatre, Tokyo, will look into the possibility of establishing a viable system, not only to protect the rights of Japanese choreographic works but also to make it easier to stage them.

Urawa, Makoto

Urawa Makoto is the stage name for Ichikawa Akira. He is a former professor of Culture Studies at Shoin University and a former advisor to the Association of Public Theatres and Halls in Japan. He has written articles for newspapers and magazines as a dance critic. He has been a member of various committees such as the Agency of Cultural Affairs and served on the judging panels of various dance competitions and awards.

(Translation: Ishikawa Mai and Donncha Crowley)

Dancing on the Boundary of Life and Death — Requiem and Hope for the Future

Tsutsumi Hiroshi

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 has not seen its end. The third wave lasted from November 2020 until February 2021, the fourth wave struck in April to May, and the fifth wave in July to September. The fifth wave, especially, accelerated so rapidly that vaccination did not prevent a healthcare collapse. There were many cases of pregnant women having miscarriages after not being able to find emergency transport, or dying while waiting at home without medical care. Under these circumstances, the hosting of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics attracted growing criticism of the government's stance of prioritizing the Olympics over the lives of the nation. In the end, the Olympics were held without spectators, but the staging of the opening and closing ceremonies provoked controversy.

097

Evaluation of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics

Initially, the choreographer Mikiko was in charge of directing the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympics, but she resigned under protest after refusing to overhaul the entire plan. The production team was disbanded, and the creative director and show directors resigned or were dismissed one after another. The opening ceremony of the Olympics was held without a creative director and was unpopular as a consequence of the lack of a coherent structure or direction. The artists risked public condemnation, but their sincere performances won the understanding and support of many people. In particular, Moriyama Mirai's dance became a hot topic. After a message of condolence for those who lost their lives to COVID-19 and the victims of the terrorist attack at the 1979 Munich

Olympics, Moriyama, dressed in white, danced with his body hitting the ground (choreographed by Omiya Daisho), and offered a silent prayer. After his performance, he posted on social media to thank all the creators involved in the opening ceremony, including Mikiko, who had stepped down, by mentioning each name. He wrote, “Finally, I would like to express my utmost respect to Okada Toshiki, the playwright and director of *Unfulfilled Ghost and Monster* [*Miren no yurei to kaibutsu*].” *Unfulfilled Ghost and Monster*, presented the previous month, was a musical play in the form of a Mugen-Noh (Dream-Noh) in two parts, *Zaha* and *Tsuruga*. *Zaha* depicted the regrets of Zaha Hadid, an architect who was once selected to design the New National Stadium, whose design was later withdrawn, and who died soon after, with Moriyama performing the role of the Shite. His dance at the opening ceremony was therefore interpreted as the repose of Zaha. Other notable performers at the opening ceremony included Hiro-Pon (Gamarjobat), who used mime-like movements to create a series of pictograms for all fifty events.

098

The opening ceremony of the Paralympics (directed by Wally Kinoshita, choreographed by Moriyama Kaiji and Kanai Keisuke) was very well received. Based on the concept that one can reach unexpected places by spreading one’s wings with courage even in headwinds, the stage was set at a “para-airport” where para-athletes were likened to airplanes taking off and landing. The main character is a small airplane with one wing that does not have the courage to take off, and Wago Yui, a girl in a wheelchair selected by audition, delivered an emotionally rich performance that was critically acclaimed. A mime, Iimuro Naoki, and a mime/juggler, Takahashi Toru of Cru Cru Cirque, played the accompanists who supported her performance. In the scene where the girl gains courage, a dancer with an artificial leg, Omae Koichi, and a dancer in a wheelchair, Kanbara Kenta, dedicated their powerful dance. Before the lighting of the Olympic flame, Morita Kazuyo, an actor and dancer with an artificial leg, performed as the “Dancer of the Sun” with vitality. The success of the ceremony was largely attributed to achievements of the stage advisor, Kris Yoshie of Slow Label, a non-profit organization devoted to the social participation of people with handicaps. Kris is the founder of Japan’s first social circus company “Slow Circus Project,”

has been presenting *T∞KY∞ – Too Good to Be a Bug (Tokyo – Mushi no ii hanashi)* in April, and fulfilled her role by assigning access coordinators to support the handicapped people at the opening ceremony.

Eyes on Tohoku

In 2013, when Tokyo was selected as the host city for the 2020 Olympics, the Prime Minister at that time, Abe Shinzo, stated that the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant was “under control.” The slogan for the Olympics was “The Olympics for Reconstruction” to support the reconstruction of the Tohoku, the northwest region, but this was not accompanied by any actual achievements. In 2021, when ten years had passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, the stage productions drew attention to the still-unrecovered Tohoku region.

The Tokyo Festival, a cultural program of the Tokyo Olympics, brought on the “Tokyo Real Underground” of the non-profit organization Dance Archive Network, and invited Kawaguchi Takao as a curator to distribute the special feature film of Butoh online. *Going to Fukushima (Fukushima ni iku)*, *Carrying Fukushima (Fukushima wo hakobu)*, and *Reflecting Fukushima (Fukushima wo utsusu)* by Otake Eiko (Eiko & Koma) were also shown. Otake frequently visited the disaster-stricken Fukushima, explored the landscape, and danced along with slide projections of her visit and experience.

Okada Toshiki showed his extraordinary talent. Inspired by the scenery of the huge seawall built along the coastline of Rikuzentakata City in Iwate Prefecture, which had been hit by the tsunami, he presented *Eraser Mountain (Keshigomu yama)* in collaboration with a plastic artist, Kaneuji Teppei. In *I Am Many Battlefields of Narratives (Watashi wa ikutsumono narateibu no batorufuiirudo)* with Yuasa Ema, he presented the first part; he plans to create a three-part piece in the future. In *Outrap* with Otagiri, a rapper, he choreographed the rapper’s dance, accompanied by rap music and lyrics, and distributed a filmed version online. In Triad Dance Project, *Genealogy of Dance (Dance no keifugaku)* by Dance Base Yokohama, Okada collaborated with a ballet dancer Sakai Hana and premiered *The Dying Swan: The Truth on Its Death (Hinshi no hakucho sono shi no shinso)*, a reconstruction of *The Dying Swan* choreographed by Michael

Fokine. Instead of using the style of the ballet, which is detached from modern society, the work was finely choreographed with a view toward up-to-date issues such as the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). In a nationwide collaborative opera production, Okada directed a modern version of Dan Ikuma's opera *Twilight Crane (Yuzuru)*, which was well received for its portrayal of the main character, Tsuu, as a woman who has overcome capitalism.

Tamura Koichiro continued to present new works in Japan. In *Thunder Thunder*, he used an essay he wrote when he was in elementary school as a motif to express the present time where people are unable to talk about their dreams like children. The motif of *K92* is a story he heard from the priest of the temple where his grandmother's funeral was held. He stated that the Buddha statue of Amitabha Buddha is leaning forward in order to be able to rush to save someone. Onstage, dancers rushed to another dancer who was about to fall down and endlessly repeated movements alternately supporting one another to depict the experience of facing death. Tamura's choreography, based on street dance, is sharp and edgy, and the unison of the group dance is energetic and powerful. In *nostalgia (Kubochi)*, literally meaning "the depression", Tamura delivered the intense impression that the victims of the tsunami are still missing, unable to attain Buddhahood, and continue to wander as ghosts inside the seawall.

100

Dancing on the Boundary of Life and Death

Influenced by COVID-19, many works depicted thoughts on the repose of souls and views on life and death.

Kasai Akira presented *Under the Cherry Tree – Kasai Akira wo Odoru (Sakura no ki no shita niwa – Kasai Akira wo odoru)*, literally meaning "Under the Cherry Tree – Dancing the Kasai Akira", based on a novel by Kajii Motojiro. Kasai has always been convinced that "the dead are moving my body," and based on the similarity to Hijikata Tatsumi's words, "Butoh is a standing corpse at the risk of its life," he adapted for the stage the view that birth and the end of life are inextricably linked. Oue Shintaro, Shimaji Yasutake, Tsujimoto Tomohiko, Moriyama Mirai, and Yanagimoto Masahiro danced sharply in suits. At the climax, they danced wildly, wearing tattoos and loincloths while a blizzard of

cherry blossoms fell. Kasai was hanging in midair wearing white makeup and a pink dress, creating a vivid contrast between life and death.

Maro Akaji danced the duo *Gold Shower* with the brilliant French dancer François Chaignaud. Based on the Greek myth in which Zeus turns into golden rain and has intercourse with Danae, it delivered a playful spectacle where Eros and Thanatos intersected.

Teshigawara Saburo premiered *Rashomon* based on a novel by Akutagawa Ryunosuke. It is set at the Rashomon gate, where people wandering on the border between life and death are abandoned after the plague spreads in Kyoto at the end of the Heian period. A menial laborer (Teshigawara), taking shelter from the rain, meets an old woman (Sato Rihoko) who plucks hair from dead bodies and sells it, and, out of hatred for that vice, he strips the old woman from her kimono and flees. The original novel ends there, but Teshigawara's version focuses on what happens to the old woman later: she dances a duo with the demon (Alexandre Riabko) who lives in Rashomon. The powerful movements of Riabko, who stars at the Hamburg Ballet; the supple expression of Sato as she transforms from ugliness to beauty; and the heavenly sound of the sho player, Miyata Mayumi, depict the purity of human beings living in a time of desperate turmoil.

Yamada Un premiered *Bridge*, a collaboration of Shomyo and Co. Yamada Un at the National Theatre of Japan's special program, *Two Microcosms – A Moment of Encounter (Futatsu no syo-uchu – Meguriau ima)*. The work expresses a wish for the end of COVID-19, between the pure land after death and the real world. The New National Theatre's program for children, *Obachetta*, with the theme of "where do we all go when we die?", delivered a lively and fun story about the main character, a young girl, who travels back and forth between the afterlife and this world with her dead grandmother, ghosts, and monsters. In Noism's double bill production, *Boundary (Kyokai)* premiered with *Near Far Here*, choreographed by Kanamori Jo and themed on the boundary between life and death, the commissioned work *Endless Opening* premiered, which was choreographed around the image of a flower offering to bring the joy of life for an audience suffering from pain and sadness.

Kitamura Akiko choreographed and directed *Midsummer Adventure of*

Kukunochi Tekuteku (*Kukunochi Tekuteku Manatsuno Bouken*) for the Kanagawa Arts Theatre Kids Program. The story is about children who go on a journey to meet their dead grandmother and encounter the god of trees in the forest. Adopting as a theme the rituals of the Obon, a memorial service where the spirits of ancestors come back from the afterlife, spend time with their families, and then return to the afterlife, the story depicted the cycle of life and death, and the concept of life and death as a part of nature, just like human beings. The staging idea of having the audience dance together wearing masks of the spirits of the forest was fun and well received.

Nakagawa Ayane presented *Shiki* (the pronunciation of *shiki* reminds the Japanese of “funeral” and “time of death”) with Japanese traditional dancers Fujima Ryotaro and Hanayagi Jusahomi portraying the moment of liberation of the dead and the attendees of a funeral.

In *Devil Dance*, Hashimoto Roma responded to the COVID-19 crisis by directing and constructing a collage of motifs such as *Dance Macabre* (*Dance of Death*) and “Ee-Janaika,” a popular movement at the end of the Tokugawa Shogunate that had the character of a movement to reform the world, in which people paraded through the town in a frenzied dance. In *Enigma*, she collaborated with a contemporary Japanese music composer and Futozao (thick neck) Shamisen player, Yamamichi Yae. It sarcastically portrayed the Ukiyo (sorrowful world) of modern Japan as a dystopia by likening the politicians who govern the country to big catfish, dancing to the tune of Gidayu-bushi (the music of the bunraku puppet theatre systematized by Takemoto Gidayu) and chanting “So easy to reform, restore the country, and recover the economy.”

There were a notable number of works adopted from Noh where ghosts of the dead appear. It seemed as if the spirit of mourning for the dead and the repose of souls flowed through Japanese culture like an underground stream.

Moriyama Kaiji appeared in the Japanese premiere of *Only the Sound Remains -Reverberation-* (*Only the Sound Remains -Yoin-*), a two-part internationally coproduced opera by a contemporary composer, Kaija Saariaho, derived from the Noh plays *Tsunemasa* and *Hagoromo*. He played out the violent conflict of the Shura-Noh and the graceful and beautiful dance of the celestial maiden

with exquisite precision. He also delivered a subtle and profound dance in the Japanese premiere of contemporary Gagaku, *The Equinoctial Time (Higan no jikan)* composed by Gondai Atsuhiko, and *Braid (Rinju)* composed by Saruya Toshiro, which premiered in Paris at the Ensemble Reigakusha and Japonismes 2018.

Ito Kaori presented the Japan premiere of *Dears (Anatae)* themed on “losing.” She adopted letters to the departed and a “wind phone,” which was set up on a hill by the sea to talk with the deceased, that many people visited after the Great East Japan Earthquake, as motifs to examine how surviving families live in an energetic and positive way. She also premiered *Le Tambour de soie (The Silk Drum)* in Japan, a dance-theatre piece inspired by the classic Noh play *Aya no tsuzumi*, and *The Twill Hand Drum (Aya no tsuzumi)*, a piece from *Five Modern Noh Plays (Kindai nogaku-shu)* by Mishima Yukio in collaboration with actor Oida Yoshi.

Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis

103

While the hardships from the COVID-19 crisis continued, some works responded to the new normal.

Asai Nobuyoshi and Okuno Shu’s physical theatre company, Moonlight Mobile Theater, toured *Peeping Garden/re:creation* nationwide. The company placed thirty doors around the stage in a circle so that each member of the audience could enjoy the performance from a peephole in an individual space while maintaining social distancing.

Ide Shigehiro’s Idevian crew premiered *Duty (Gimu)*. With playful scenes, it depicted the “duty” of living with COVID-19. In the last part, *Tokyo Games Ondo*, folk dance music created to celebrate the 1964 Tokyo Olympics faded in the distance, and the scene unfolded with people isolated by a huge black curtain, depicting the holding of the Olympics with a sense of contemporaneity.

Onodera Shuji’s Company Derashinera presented *Toge* (literally meaning “thorn” but implying the English word “together”), a new work inspired by George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. It was a silent play depicting a self-governing life free from power and structure.

Hope for the Future

Public theatres have been reviewing their operations and revamping their human resources. Many municipalities are having financial difficulties. Itami City in Hyogo Prefecture considered changing the use of its Itami City Theatre Hall (Ai Hall) and has decided to abolish its independent projects and just rent its spaces.

Niigata City has reviewed the artist-in-residence program of Noism, a dance company exclusive to Ryutopia Niigata City Performing Arts Center. The term of office for the artistic director was set at one term of five years or less, with a new limit of two terms, and Kanamori Jo was selected to continue in the role. Noism premiered *The Rite of Spring (Haru no saiten)* this year, transforming Stravinsky's instrumentation and sound textures into choreography to vividly visualize the music and drama. Kanamori has also been actively collaborating with outside organizations, including the premiere production of *Zan-ei no Niwa – Traces Garden* with the Reigakusha Ensemble, in which the composition of Gagaku music was transformed into movement. In Dance Dance Dance@Yokohama 2021, he presented *A Journey – To the Memory within the Memory (A Journey – Kiokunonaka no kioku e)* with the artistic director Kobayashi Juichi in the leading role. In *Kaguyahime*, commissioned by the Tokyo Ballet, the first act premiered, and in 2023, the company will present a full-length work of all three acts.

Saitama Arts Theater announced the appointment of Kondo Ryohei (Condors) as its next artistic director. Since its launching, Condors has gained popularity and a wide range of support for its stage performances that go beyond the boundaries of conventional dance. In *OneVision*, its 25th anniversary production in Tokyo, the company performed with a dance team for the handicapped. Handles has been involved in social contribution activities through dance, dancing with local residents, children, and the handicapped, and expectations are high for an open theatre that combines culture, art, education, and welfare. In Saitama, it has been presenting a new work every year, including *Free as a Bird* in 2021, in which the members played hide-and-seek behind Kondo, who was standing on a cityscape that looked like a white paper cutout. Its staging and direction demonstrated how he colors the community and were highly acclaimed. Kondo also produced the open theatre work *Born on a Star with*

Dance (Dance no aru hoshi ni umarete) and showed a part of his vision through a diverse program that blended genres such as dance, music, and theatre. His friend Nagatsuka Keishi was appointed artistic director of KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre earlier than Kondo's appointment, which indicates generational changes are underway in many places.

I believe that each organization's attitude to do what it can do now, without depending on the intentions of the government, gives hope for the future. Having a long-term vision and being prepared to take immediate action will be the exit strategy after the pandemic.

Tsutsumi, Hiroshi

Born in 1966, in Kawasaki. He graduated in theatre studies in the Department of Literature at Bunka Gakuin. He worked as an editor for art, entertainment, theatre, and dance magazines before going freelance. He has covered a wide range of performing art genres, including small theatre, *shingeki*-style (modern realism) theatre, underground (*Angura*) theatre, commercial theatre, traditional theatre, and dance scenes. He has served as a selection committee member for the Toyota Choreography Award and on the jury for Guardian Garden Theatre Festival and SAI International Dance Festival. He edited *The Flying Dangoro Party in the Sky "Rebirth of Acharaka" (Sora tobu kumo no ue Dangoro ichiza "Acharaka sai tanjo")*, *Performing Arts in Germany Today*, and Peter Brook's *The Road to "Battlefield,"* among other works.

(Translation: Yamashita Madoka)

Television Dramas

Transcending Divisions to Live with the Dead

Okamuro Minako

The dark cloud of COVID-19 continued to hang over 2021, but a large number of television dramas were produced under various anti-infection measures and restrictions, unlike the previous year where many productions were shut down altogether. We also saw more characters in these dramas wearing masks, suggesting that the idea of living with COVID-19 has filtered down to everyday life.

Particularly noteworthy is the sheer number of television dramas worth watching in 2021. This was presumably the result of creators feeling stirred to action after the shutdowns during last year's state of emergency.

2021 also marked ten years since the Great East Japan Earthquake, and a striking number of television dramas took up this event as theme. Many of these works were of very high quality.

In this essay, I would like to look back on a few television dramas from 2021 that left a particularly deep impression.

Dramas That Resonate amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

The first masterpiece created amid the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic was *Story of My Family!!! (Ore no ie no hanashi)* (Scriptwriter: Kudo Kankuro; Chief Producer: Isoyama Aki; Directors: Kaneko Fuminori et al.; TBS). One might call this a culmination of the achievements of the team behind such popular TBS dramas as *Ikebukuro West Gate Park* (2000), *Tiger & Dragon* (2005), and *Conceited Detective (Unubore deka)* (2010).

Protagonist Miyama Juichi (Nagase Tomoya), though the son of Noh artist and Living National Treasure Miyama Jusaburo (Nishida Toshiyuki), left home at a young age to become a professional wrestler. Now, however, his father has fallen ill, precipitating Juichi's return to the family home. The drama unfolds around

the question of who will be named Jusaburo's successor, drawing in figures such as Sakura (Toda Erika), a caregiver who became engaged to Jusaburo; Juichi's younger sister Mai (Eguchi Noriko) and younger brother Yosuke (Nagayama Kento); and live-in Noh trainee Jugemu (Kiritani Kenta). Addressing issues where descent into the muddy waters of intrafamily strife seems inevitable, such as inheritance and Noh *iemoto* (traditional school leader) succession, the series connected the utterly different worlds of pro wrestling and Noh to depict, in the final episode, a vision of love between parent and child that transcends even the boundaries between life and death, greatly moving the audience. Nagase Tomoya's inspired performance as both Noh actor and pro wrestler will be remembered for some time.

"Home dramas," stories about families, were once a staple of Japanese television, but dramas that take up family-related themes directly seem to have been pushed outside the mainstream at some point. However, pandemic-imposed "self-restraint" has led many people to face their families in new ways. *Story of My Family!!!* demonstrated a new type of home drama and made topics like aging and nursing care feel immediate and relevant to younger viewers. (Tokyo Drama Awards 2021: Series Drama Grand Prix, Best Supporting Actor—Nishida Toshiyuki, Best Supporting Actress—Eguchi Noriko; 58th Galaxy Awards: Award for Excellence)

My Dear Exes (Omameda Towako to sannin no moto-otto) (Scriptwriter: Sakamoto Yuji; Chief Producer: Sano Ayumi; Producers: Nakae Kazuhito et al.; KTV) did not depict COVID-19 directly, but the fact that it was broadcast during the pandemic felt meaningful. The series depicted the interactions between Omameda Towako (Matsu Takako) and her three ex-husbands: Tanaka Hassaku (Matsuda Ryuhei), Sato Kataro (Kakuta Akihiro), and Nakamura Shinshin (Okada Masaki). Unlike the standard television drama, which uses dramatic scenes to move viewers, *My Dear Exes* was created with a completely different grammar. Major events do occur in the characters' lives—the death of Omameda's close friend Watarai Kagome (Ichikawa Mikako), a marriage proposal from Takanashi Hiroshi (Odagiri Joe)—but these are not depicted directly. Instead, they are translated into everyday words and discussed in almost casual

conversations. Through those conversations, the viewer encounters the subtleties and pains of the characters' lives and ponders their pasts and unrealized possible futures. In a world where everyday opportunities for casual conversation have drastically decreased due to the pandemic, these everyday conversations woven by Sakamoto Yuji, by turns poignant and hilarious, revealed a richness that we may not have expected from casual interactions. The finely judged performances by Matsu Takako and the other cast members, the unique narration by Ito Sairi, the ending music that changed with every episode, and the directorial choice to point out highlights at the beginning of each episode—all felt like part of a relaxed conversation, resulting in a drama with a high degree of perfection. (76th Agency for Cultural Affairs Arts Festival: Award for Excellence—Television Drama, Tokyo Drama Awards 2021: Series Drama Award for Excellence, Scriptwriting Award—Sakamoto Yūji, Theme Song Award—“Presence,” performed by STUTS & Matsu Takako with 3exes; 2021 Japan Commercial Broadcasters Association Awards: Award for Excellence—Television Drama Program; 59th Galaxy Awards: Award—Television, first half of year)

108

How to Be Likable in a Crisis (*Ima koko ni aru kiki to boku no kokando ni tsuite*) (Scriptwriter: Watanabe Aya; Executive Producers: Katsuta Natsuko and Kurube Kei; Directors: Shibata Takeshi and Horikirizono Kentaro) was another drama that held up a mirror to our current reality. Protagonist Kanzaki Makoto (Matsuzaka Tori), a former news presenter, becomes a PR representative for elite Teito University and is forced to respond to scandal after scandal. Under the influence of his ex-girlfriend Kijima Minori (Suzuki An), who left the university after reporting a case of plagiarism, he gradually awakens to become an honorable man. In the final episode, the opening of a “next-generation science and technology expo” is thrown into chaos when a fictional invasive, disease-bearing insect, the Sahara housefly, escapes from a research laboratory, recalling the difficulties around holding the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While addressing various problems related to higher education and society, using the plagiarized paper as an underlying motivation, *How to Be Likable In a Crisis* also comments on how scientific research is conducted at universities and

the problems arising from pressure from government and business for short-term results. However, it never reduces these topics to a simple morality tale, making it a drama with real depth, sincerely asking questions about what it means to do the right thing. (76th Agency for Cultural Affairs Arts Festival: Grand Prix—Television Drama; 59th Galaxy Awards: Award—Television, first half of year)

Dramas a Decade after the Great East Japan Earthquake

2021 marked ten years since the deaths of thousands in the Great East Japan Earthquake, and there was a noticeable contingent of dramas addressing the disaster and its aftermath.

One of these was the serial drama *Welcome Back, Mone* (*Okaeri Mone*) (Scriptwriter: Adachi Naoko; Executive Producers: Yoshinaga Akashi, Suzuki Takashi; Directors: Ichiki Masae et al.; NHK). On the day of the tsunami, heroine Nagaura “Mone” Momone (Kiyohara Kaya) was away from Kameshima Island in Kesenuma, Miyagi, where she was born and raised, so she did not see the tragedy firsthand. Overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness, she longs to do something for the people of her hometown, and finally encounters the profession of weather forecaster. This drama was a sincere depiction of someone accepting that they cannot understand the suffering of those who affected by the tragedy but striving to support them anyway. As Dr. Sukanami (Sakaguchi Kentaro) says to Mone, “I don’t understand your pain. But I want to understand it.”

Great cycles of nature and life are depicted in this work, which begins in the Tohoku region, then shifts its setting to Tokyo before returning to Tohoku again. We tend to be divided by binary categories: disaster-stricken areas and areas that were spared; those directly affected and those not; Tohoku and Tokyo. I believe that this drama hides a prayer for connection across these divisions, made possible by striving to grasp suffering even if we cannot understand it. In a way, the character of Mone is the embodiment of that prayer. (Galaxy Awards: Award—Television, October 2021)

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake, we have seen more dramas with ghosts making an appearance—not terrifying ghosts who seek to frighten the

living, but kindly ghosts who watch over their families warmly from beyond the grave. I suspect that this is because, after being starkly confronted with the reality of so many lives being lost suddenly in the earthquake and subsequent tsunami, people have begun thinking seriously about how to live with the dead instead of forgetting them.

Peperoncino (Scriptwriter: Isshiki Nobuyuki; Executive Producer: Aoki Kazunori; Director: Maruyama Takuya; NHK), made in Miyagi Prefecture, was another superior drama that could be located in this tradition. Protagonist Onodera Kiyoshi (Kusagani Tsuyoshi) is a chef whose Italian restaurant was destroyed by the tsunami. For a time afterward, he succumbed to alcoholism, but on the tenth anniversary of the disaster, he and his wife Akari (Yoshida Yo) invited the people who helped him find his way to his new, reconstructed restaurant. However, in the closing scenes, it is revealed that Akari has actually been missing since the tsunami. Kusanagi's cool performance, with emotional expression carefully controlled, actually speaks far more clearly about the suffering his character has overcome, making the viewer feel the weight of the decade. (47th Hoso Bunka Foundation Prize: Grand Prix—Program, Television Drama, Actor—Kusanagi Tsuyoshi, Scriptwriter—Isshiki Nobuyuki; 58th Galaxy Awards: Incentive Award—Television)

Old Jack & Rose (Sono onna, jiruba) (Original Story: Arima Shinobu; Scriptwriter: Yoshida Noriko; Producers: Toyama Keisuke, Shizukuishi Mizuho, et al.; Directors: Murakami Makito et al.; Tokai TV) weaves a range of issues, including the Great East Japan Earthquake, Brazilian immigration, and the COVID-19 pandemic, into a richly drawn portrait of heroine Usui Arata's rebirth. The story takes place against the backdrop of "Old Jack & Rose," a bar where the average age of the hostesses is 70. The strong supporting performances by Kusabue Mitsuko, Eguchi Noriko, and Matobu Sei were outstanding, and Ikewaki Chizuru's convincing depiction of Arata living her best life with "a woman's life begins at forty" as her watchword was simply superb. The power of older women to casually shatter tiresome polarities like "winners vs. losers" or "youth vs. age" was a great comfort to women feeling the oppressive weight of daily life. (47th Hoso Bunka Foundation Prize: Incentive Award—Television Drama Program,

Acting Award—Ikewaki Chizuru; 2021 Japan Commercial Broadcasters Association Awards: Award for Excellence—Television Drama Program; 58th Galaxy Awards: Selection—Television)

Other Superb Dramas

Producer Arai Junko and director Tsukahara Ayuko are a reliable hitmaking duo for TBS Sparkle, and they remained in fine form. Their series *Dearest (Saiai)* (Scriptwriters: Okudera Satoko, Shimizu Yukako; Producer: Arai Junko; Directors: Tsukahara Ayuko, Yamamoto Takeyoshi, Murao Yoshiaki, TBS) spans a fifteen-year time period anchored by two murders, exploring the various ways in which people and things can be held “dearest” by others. The series was a highly polished work, tightly constructed from opening to conclusion. The drama unfolds around the cat-and-mouse struggles and frustrations between those with secrets and those striving to uncover them. Lawyer Kase Ken’ichiro (Iura Arata) has long kept a certain secret to protect heroine Sanada Rio (Yoshitaka Yuriko) and her younger brother, Asamiya Yu (Takahashi Fumiya), while detective Miyazaki Daiki (Matsushita Kohei) has fought to uncover the truth. In the final episode, Kase transmits the secret to Miyazaki at last. This ending, in which love for Rio and Yu sees Daiki transcend the opposition between secret-keepers and investigators, left a deep impression on the audience.

Here I would like to list some other superb dramas broadcast in 2021 that I cannot describe in detail for reasons of space. *Life’s Punchline (Konto ga hajimaru, NTV)*, *Piano Man in Six-Tatami Room (Rokujoma no piano man, NHK)*, *Land of Beauty (Kirei no kuni, NHK)*, *Bullets, Bones and Broken Noses (Oliver na inu (Gosh!!) kono yaro, NHK)*, *Love’s in Sight! (Koi desu! Yankii-kun to hakujo gaaru, NTV)* were all unforgettable.

In Closing

Considering examples like *Story of My Family!!!*, *My Dear Exes*, *Welcome Back, Mone*, *Peperoncino*, and *Old Jack & Rose*, a good many of the dramas broadcast in 2021 were about living with the dead: engaging them in dialogue, sensing their presence, finding them reborn as new life, and acting as their spiritual heirs. This

likely has some connection both to the ten-year anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic, which cast the shadow of death on everyday life. Families, casual conversation, human connection: themes and motifs that hit particularly hard in the pandemic context were found in abundance.

This earnest engagement with our current reality by television drama creators resulted in many masterpieces of the medium being aired. In 2022, I hope sincerely that the COVID-19 pandemic will come to an end.

Okamuro, Minako

Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum Director and Professor, Faculty of Letters, Arts and Sciences, Waseda University. Specializes in television drama theory and contemporary theatre. Television drama category selection committee member for Galaxy Awards, Hoso Bunka Foundation Prize, and Japan Commercial Broadcasters Association Awards, among others. Director at Broadcast Programming Center. Member of Fuji TV's Program Examination Committee. Trustee of the Hashida Cultural Foundation.

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Developments in Japan and Overseas
in 2021

Developments in Japan and Overseas

At Our Posts, Ten Years after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami

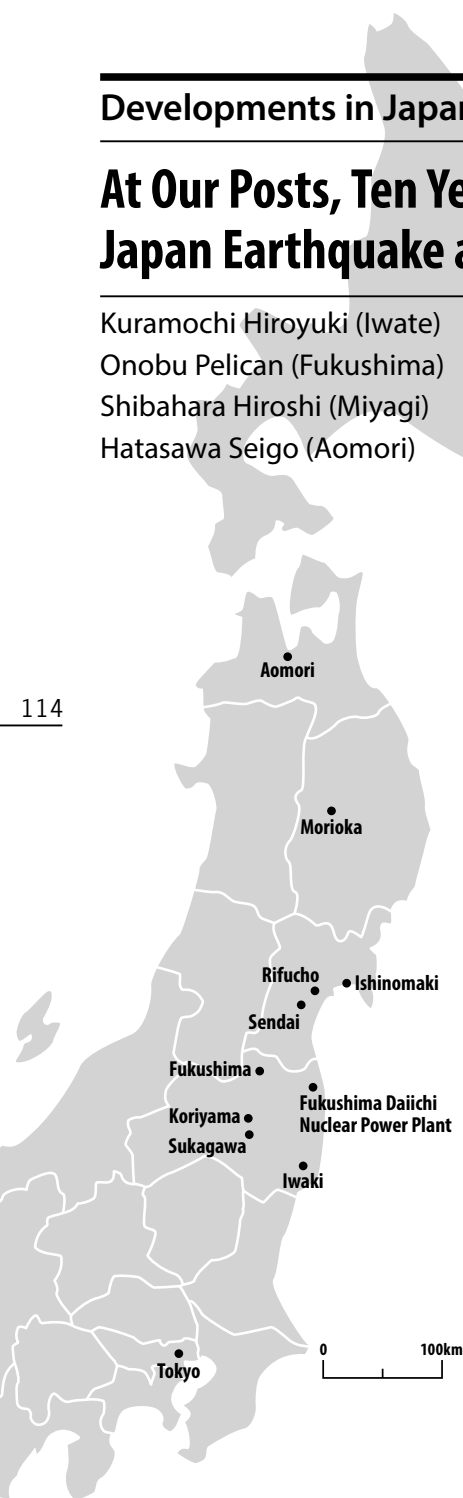
Kuramochi Hiroyuki (Iwate)

Onobu Pelican (Fukushima)

Shibahara Hiroshi (Miyagi)

Hatasawa Seigo (Aomori)

The Great East Japan Earthquake caused an unprecedented, multifaceted disaster primarily in the Tohoku region, one that included a massive tsunami and a nuclear accident at the Tokyo Electric Power Company's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Since the disaster struck on March 11, 2011, about 20,000 people have died, either directly or incidentally, and over 2,500 people remain missing. The tenth anniversary of the disaster came in 2021, but the worldwide threat of the COVID-19 pandemic forced many related events to be canceled or held online. Even the Tokyo Olympics, billed as the "Olympics of Recovery," will instead be remembered as the Olympics of the COVID pandemic, as an event that did nothing to support disaster recovery. Even so, the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami will forever remain in our consciousness. We therefore asked four theatrical artists from the Tohoku region who have continued to confront the disaster to write from their own viewpoints about the past ten years, their current thoughts, and the future of "disaster and theater."



Iwate— What It Means to Be “Unprecedented”

Kuramochi Hiroyuki

So here we are in late autumn, ten years after the fact, and I still don't know where to begin.

Immediately after the disaster, I created *Rubble and Pastries: Ristorante Earthquake Disaster Edition* to perform at the PAW 2011 Tohoku Reconstruction Week event, organized by the Group for Creation of the Yokohama Boat Theater, which invited theater companies from the disaster area that were otherwise unable to perform. That work was an earthquake disaster version of a dramatic reading I created based on the concept of reading a menu. It comprised a mixture of newspaper articles and memoirs from that time, focusing on what people ate in evacuation centers and their homes immediately after the disaster.

While Morioka is in a disaster-stricken prefecture, it feels inappropriate to describe the city itself as having been disaster-stricken in comparison to the prefecture's coastal towns, so those of us active here have been hesitant to directly address the disaster itself. Then again, no theater company along the Iwate coast has the resources to travel to Yokohama to perform, despite wanting to respond to the wishes of the people of Yokohama. I therefore wondered what might be possible given the circumstances.

In 2021, therefore, we organized *3/11: Reflections on a Decade of Plays About the Disaster*, sponsored by the Tohoku Branch of the Japan Playwrights Association from February to April 2021, performed and distributed as a reading event during the COVID pandemic. The participants included theatrical artists from Kumamoto, which was hit by an earthquake in



A live talk, *Reflections on a Decade of Plays About the Disaster* (2021).
Photo: Takahashi Hiroomi

2016, along with others from Nagoya, a city people have been saying for over thirty years could be hit at any time by an offshore earthquake in the Nankai Trough.

Other than that, we also performed *Family Tree* (by Aizawa Kazunari), which features the Miyagi dialect and the participation of local theater people, and *Clippy & Ms. U* (by Onobu Pelican). Participating in *Clippy* were people from Shizuoka, another potential disaster area and home to a nuclear power plant, and people from the United States, directed by James Yaegashi, who led the “SHINSAI: Theaters for Japan” reading event that united us with the United States one year after the disaster. In addition to readings, they also presented talks that combined online and offline life. We also covered a high-school play that addressed the disaster. You can get an idea of what that was like by visiting the following website (available as of December 2021): <https://shin10year.shin-sai-engeki.com/>.

In addition to *Rubble and Pastries*, which was created in the year of the disaster, over the past decade I have been involved in several plays related to the earthquake.

Just at the time of the earthquake, I was traveling by train on the Joban Line, on my way to Iwaki in Fukushima Prefecture to meet some Tohoku-region theater people with the aim of revitalizing the Tohoku Branch of the Japan

Morioka Citizen's Theater Company, *Morioka in That Year: 1896* (2013). Photo: Takahashi Hiroomi



Playwrights Association. A joint production of *Earthquake Taxi*, which was modeled on my return journey from there to Morioka, was created by Watanabe Genshiro Shoten in Aomori and the Virtual Theater Company, which I direct. That show toured five locations across Japan between September and December 2012. I was also involved in the *Morioka in That Year* series, a biennial theater event held in Morioka with the participation of its citizens that has used the Meiji Sanriku Tsunami (1896), the Showa Sanriku Tsunami (1933), and the Great East Japan Earthquake (2011) as motifs.

Common among all of these is being near to, but not at the site of the tsunami, yet being unable to avoid it and not entirely uninvolved.

I have been involved in many other activities, such as hosting theater workshops at coastal schools and holding symposiums. In retrospect, it is somewhat unclear what things are meaningful and what things are less so. I was at a loss with regards to what I had been doing so far, because I was unsure whether I'd attained sufficient wisdom to say with certainty that I don't care whether what I've done has been useful or useless, meaningful or meaningless.

And here we are, still in the midst of the COVID pandemic. Ten years after the Great East Japan Earthquake, once again we find ourselves in a situation we never imagined might happen during our lifetimes. Moreover, the current state of affairs has completely ripped apart a certain utopia that developed right after the disaster, one in which we had utmost concern for our neighbors.

I remain at a loss, because the unprecedented always comes from an unimagined direction.

Kuramochi, Hiroyuki

Playwright and stage director. Born in 1966 in Bando City, Ibaraki Prefecture, currently resides and works in Morioka, Iwate Prefecture. He specializes in conversations that explore the nooks and crannies of subjects as varied as temples, obstetricians, nurseries, and photo studios. Since 2005, he has been conducting workshops as a theater workshop facilitator at various locations in Iwate Prefecture. President of the Tohoku Branch of the Japan Playwrights Association. Part-time lecturer in the Faculty of Education, Iwate University. Director of the Virtual Theater Company.

Fukushima— Expectations for a Wider Network

Onobu Pelican

In June 2011, I presented *Clippy & Ms. U* in Tokyo. Taking as its motif the accident at TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, an essential element in the relationship between the Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima, this work depicts confusion over “invisible things” that surrounded Fukushima after the accident.

Against daily updates regarding unfamiliar units like sieverts and becquerels, neither the government's assurances that there would be no immediate impact nor the heated debates regarding our safety that flooded the timelines of social networking sites were helpful toward allowing me to make decisions as a resident; I just felt as if meaningless information was flying about in all directions. As I came to realize my unknowing indifference to the existence of nuclear power plants, which can run out of control if an accident occurs, it started to feel as if all those words were bundles of lies. Faced with such overwhelming reality and slippery words, like many theater artists I was left unable to grasp what was key to my own creations.

Clippy & Ms. U (Tokyo, 2011). Photo: Akai Yasuhiro



Nonetheless, we created and presented this work, which I described at the time as “destiny” because of the desires and hopes for theater that remained deep within me, even in the midst of my despair. Desires to capture the atmosphere of the moment, and hopes that the theater can speak in a language with impact. As we performed the work in various places, I felt my despair gradually healing. The rehearsals and performances were a kind of therapy.

The story is a simple one: the characters in it are looking for the missing “Ms. U” in a town where “Clippy,” the son of a newsstand owner, is cutting up the store’s newspapers and scattering them about. Neither Clippy nor Ms. U make an appearance, despite their names being in the piece’s title. Actually, the main character in the story is the dirty town itself. By the end of the story, by picking up and reading the newspaper clippings the characters have realized that Ms. U is (most likely) dead, and they sing “The Star Festival Song” with feelings of rebirth for the town.

In addition to our home base in Fukushima, we performed this work in Aomori, Sendai, Yokohama, Yokosuka, Kitakyushu, and Munich, Germany.

In 2021, the tenth year after the earthquake, there were three performances of *Clippy & Ms. U*. One was in January, a reprise of a performance by our theater company, Thea Trie. That event was organized by the Sendai Performing Arts Forum at Sendai Theater Studio 10-Box. The other two were readings in Shizuoka and New York, organized by the Tohoku Branch of the Japan Playwrights Association. The Shizuoka reading was performed by the Fujieda City-based theater company Unique Point, and the New York reading was performed by James Yaegashi’s



Clippy & Ms. U (Sendai, 2021). Photo: Iwabuchi Takashi

company. Both are connections we made as a result of the earthquake. By once again coming into contact with these vivid works, created immediately after the disaster, I was reminded of the passage of the past ten years and the connections we made through this work.

Looking back, since the earthquake there has been a definite deepening of ties between the theater companies in Fukushima Prefecture and other areas. The theater company Unit Rabbits from Koriyama City has deepened its relationship with the Ryuzanji Company in Tokyo, working together on several projects, including a staging of Fukushima-born Mafune Yutaka's *Weasel* in Sukagawa in February 2021, directed by Ryuzanji Sho and featuring mainly actors from Fukushima. In Iwaki City, Takagi Toru, a Seinenza Theater Company graduate and resident of Iwaki City, took the lead in staging two works in Iwaki City and Tokyo on the themes of Fukushima and nuclear power plants: *When the East Wind Blows* and *Embracing Love and Death*. The third play in this series has been produced, but the final one has not been performed due to the COVID pandemic. In addition, people working in theater in Fukushima have expanded their network beyond the prefecture, far more than what can be related here, including high school theater.

Ten years have passed since the earthquake, but the situation in Fukushima remains complicated, such the recent decision to release treated water from the nuclear power plant into the ocean. I hope that grassroots activities by our local theater artists will lead to the reconstruction of Fukushima and a revitalization of communication through impactful language.

Onobu, Pelican

Born in 1975 in Hyogo Prefecture. Entered Fukushima University in 1994 and has lived in Fukushima Prefecture since. Began theater activities while in college. Started the Manrui Tori King Theater Company (currently Thea Trie) in 1996, and since then has written and directed nearly all of its works. He has also been involved in many productions in addition to his work with Thea Trie. He is also actively involved in teaching workshops and other outreach activities.

Miyagi— Moving Forward, Together

Shibahara Hiroshi

I was in Tokyo on that day. Despite having left for Tokyo as soon as I graduated from high school with no intention of returning, the disaster that struck my hometown of Ishinomaki, in Miyagi Prefecture, shocked me. Even so, geographical and blood ties are so strong in my hometown that relationships from elementary and junior high school carry over into adulthood, something that makes me uncomfortable, so I did not feel the need to “do something for my hometown” immediately after the disaster, despite the damage I saw there.

However, the friends I made through the theater every time I returned to Ishinomaki, as well as new friends from Iwate that I met in Tokyo, slowly changed my mind, and now I am involved in theater festivals in my hometown. I began to spend increasingly more time thinking about my hometown, and in 2019 I decided to live in Miyagi for the first time in twenty years.

I am writing this on November 3, 2021. The fifth annual Ishinomaki Theatre Festival has begun. This city didn't have what you would call a thriving theater culture, but theater troupes created after the earthquake and theater artists from Ishinomaki who were active in Tokyo wanted to perform in Ishinomaki as a way to help liven up their hometown. The Ishinomaki Theatre Festival was started in 2016 to facilitate that.

After the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, theater people in Sendai, which is also in Miyagi Prefecture, immediately acted, playing a major role in both the soft and hard aspects of the recovery process. By contrast, the word “theater” was rarely heard in Ishinomaki City.

The Ishinomaki Theater Festival was born against that backdrop, as a month long event where theater performances are put on every weekend and national holiday. It is held in the hopes that residents will be able to see a play every week during that month, or at least have some contact with the theater. The 2020 festival was unavoidably canceled, but a characteristic of our city today is that we can take advantage of even a situation as dire as the COVID pandemic to create works of art with free ideas, and we have audiences who will

want to enjoy them.

In the summer of 2020, when infection rates were relatively under control, theater people in Ishinomaki immediately tried their hand at staging performances rich in ideas.

One example is *PeePing Tom* (June–July), a “peephole theater” production where one actor and one audience member share a theatrical space across a wall in a space the size of only four and a half tatami mats. Like me, producer Yaguchi Ryuta went to Tokyo for college, where he continued his theatrical activities until 2018, returning to his hometown a little before I did. Toko Mariko created a virtual reality play *Naked Day Break* at a local gallery and broadcast it from September through October. Ms. Toko, who is from Tokyo, became involved with Ishinomaki as a volunteer after the earthquake, and has now moved to the area and continues to be actively involved there. I myself resumed holding monthly reading sessions in August. These are “lip-sync readings,” where performers act as if they are reading pre-recorded scripts right in front of you. We tried to make the experience as close as possible to a live performance, so that audiences can watch in safety.

Each of these performances attracted attention and was well-received. This was one of the most severely damaged cities in the Great East Japan Earthquake, but one that was making significant progress toward recovery. Possibly for

exactly that reason, even if COVID-19 poses a stumbling block, it remains a place filled with a spirit for enjoying the situation we’re facing.

Since 2017, Ishinomaki has hosted the Reborn-Art Festival, a wide-ranging art festival featuring art, music, and food. In August and September 2021, the



PeePing Tom (2020), written and directed by Yaguchi Ryuta.
Photo: Ishinomaki Theater Arts Association

festival gathered letters from residents, asking them to “send us a letter relating a color and an event you want to tell people about.” These were displayed an art installation by Takahashi Kyota, in which the Ishinomori Manga Museum in the city center was lit up in those colors. Every day, citizens could learn about the feelings behind this lighting through newspaper and radio coverage. During the exhibition there were outdoor performances that I participated in, reading the letters. The personal stories that the actors delivered through their bodies and voices greatly impacted the town of Ishinomaki, which for the decade since the Great East Japan Earthquake had been searching for the words to express those stories.

In such ways, through theater I remain involved with my hometown Ishinomaki in various ways. I currently live in Sendai, but I hope to continue to slowly grow closer to my hometown as it recovers and theater culture develops there.

Shibahara, Hiroshi

Born in 1982 in Ishinomaki. Actor. Graduated from the Toho Gakuen College of Drama and Music with a major in theater. Member of the Kokushoku Kitan Kanariaha troupe. Director of the drama unit Comainu. After working for a time in Tokyo, in 2019 he started working in Miyagi prefecture. He is currently conducting the “Comainu Monthly Reading Performance” in Ishinomaki as his life work. He has also been involved in the Ishinomaki Theater Festival from its inception as an executive committee member. He received the Miyagi Prefecture Art Encouragement Award in 2020.

Reborn-Art Festival 2021–22, *A Gift of Light*, reading performance.
Photo provided by Ishinomaki Theater Arts Association



Aomori— Being an Outsider

Hatasawa Seigo

I was in the city of Aomori when the earthquake and tsunami hit. We lost power for three days, but we were fortunate enough to escape serious damage. However, for some time I found myself unable to write. What's the point of creating tragedy on paper, I thought, when I'm surrounded by actual tragedy? But it is impossible to live in the Tohoku region and remain indifferent to the disaster that occurred here. I couldn't *not* write about it. But then again, what's the point in someone like me, an outsider to the events in the disaster areas, writing anything? After much deliberation, I decided to be honest about my distance. There is distance between me and the hardest-hit areas and cities, and distance between myself and those directly affected by the severe damage. It would feel sinful for me, living in distant Aomori, to have those outside of the Tohoku region, residents of Tokyo, for example, to read my work as if I were speaking with the voice of a disaster survivor. I decided I needed to write from the position of someone standing beside those who were most affected, but not amongst them. That I could paint myself as being near them, but not one of them.

The result was *What If a High School Baseball Team Manager Invited an Aomori Medium?*, a play put on by the Aomori Central High School Drama Club. The story is about a high school baseball player who lost his teammates and family in the Great East Japan Earthquake. He transfers to a high school in Aomori, where he meets a coach who is an *itako*, a Shinto medium, and aims to win



A showing of *What If a High School Baseball Team Manager Invited an Aomori Medium?* at the Rifu Town Tofunosato Plaza Cultural Hall on June 2, 2012. Photo: Kimura Masayuki

at the Japanese High School Baseball Championship. The story was created in anticipation of its being performed in support of disaster areas. It therefore uses no set pieces, no props, no lighting, and no sound effects. It can



What If a High School Baseball Team Manager Invited an Aomori Medium? (2014) Festival/Tokyo 14. Photo: Matsumoto Kazuyuki

thus be performed anywhere with enough space, such as a gymnasium or assembly hall, without need of even a stage or curtains. The entire cast sings the songs, they all hum the background music, and even the sound effects are produced by voice. The actors express everything, using only their bodies and their actual voices. Before putting on a performance, the first thing they would do upon arriving was clean. Some venues had previously been emergency shelters, so they took their time and did a conscientious job. Several times, the seats would fill up while the cast was still warming up. One venue, which was adjacent to a temporary housing complex, had particularly many visitors. Most were elderly, and they laughed and cried at seeing high school students, who were around the age of their grandchildren, running around in such high spirits. As they left, they shook the hands of the club members.

They also performed this work at the 58th National High School Drama Festival, held at Toyama Prefectural Hall in August 2012, at which, possibly blessed by the gods of drama, they won the Grand Prize (the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Award). From September 2011 to the present, the play has been shown on 107 stages in 50 cities and towns in 22 Japanese prefectures and overseas. They were invited to Festival/Tokyo 14 in 2014 and Festival Bo:m in Seoul in 2015, thereby gaining attention both at home and abroad, beyond the scope of mere high school theater.

In 2019, the group put on a performance at a junior high school in Aomori. In a planning meeting, one teacher mentioned that they would need to do some preparatory study. That makes sense when you consider that first-year junior

high students in that year would have been only five years old when the earthquake struck. I therefore decided to provide a commentary to review what happened in the Great East Japan Earthquake as part of the announcements before the show started. This made me keenly feel the passage of time. In the winter of that year, a certain broadcasting station asked me to do an interview, but the offer was later retracted. “My boss told me there’s no point in staging what amounts to a requiem for the dead in a time like this, when we’re making so much progress toward recovery,” said the young manager who had telephoned me. I guess the mood was one for just moving forward and forgetting about the disaster. Or maybe his boss figured that the bulk of the Japanese public had already done so. It’s now been eleven years since the first showing of *What If...* All scheduled performances for 2020 and 2021 were canceled. I hope that once the fog of COVID-19 lifts, we will once again be able to travel throughout Japan. Even when there is no longer need for a requiem, we will never stop. That is one of the great missions of the theater.

Hatasawa, Seigo

Born in 1964 in Akita Prefecture. Playwright and director. Director of the Watanabe Genshiro Shoten theater troupe. He is based in Aomori and active nationwide. Winner of the Grand Prize in the Short Play Competition at the 2005 Convention of the Japan Playwrights Association. His radio drama scripts have won awards including the Grand Prize at the Agency for Cultural Affairs Art Festival. His scripts for the stage include Komatsuzaki's *Living with Mother* and HoriPro's *Hana—1970, the Day Koza Burned*. Currently working as a high school teacher and drama club advisor. The high schools he has coached have gone to nine national championships, winning three Grand Prizes and the five Awards for Excellence.

(Translation: Tony Gonzalez)



Modern Drama Association's second production, *Faust*. (From the left) Iba Takashi playing Mephistopheles, Yamakawa Uraji playing the Witch and Marthe, and Kamiyama Sojin playing Faust. (Reprinted by courtesy of Theatre Publishing Company. Taken from page 13 of the *Guidebook to Shingeki Theatre in the Meiji-Taisho Era*, written and edited by Tanaka Eizo).

127

Developments in Japan and Overseas

The 160th Anniversary of Mori Ogai's Birth and the Centenary of His Death —Ogai and the Performing Arts

Itoda Soichiro

Mori Ogai—The Unknown Theatre Expert

Mori Ogai was born in 1862 in Tsuwano, Shimane Prefecture, and died in 1922 in Tokyo. The year 2022 marks the 160th anniversary of his birth and hundredth anniversary of his death. Most people know him as the author of the novels *Maihime* (*The Dancing Girls*), *Takasebune* (*The Boat on the Takase River*), and



A photo of Mori Ogai taken while he was staying in Berlin in 1888. ©Bunkyo City Mori Ogai Memorial Museum

the biographical novel *Shibue Chusai*. Only a few remember him as a someone who never stopped loving theatre and opera. The Japanese translation of *Faust* may be the most accessible of his numerous theatre works today.⁽¹⁾ However, Mori Ogai's literary journey began in January 1889 when he published his translation of the play *The Mayor of Zalamea* (*Shirabewatakeashi gitarura no hitofushi*) by Pedro Calderón de la Barca in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper a few months after his return from Germany. And the journey ended in January 1920 with his translation of *The Pelican* by August Strindberg in the literary journal *Shirakaba* (*White Birch*). His literary life began and ended with plays; he translated more than fifty in all. But we must search

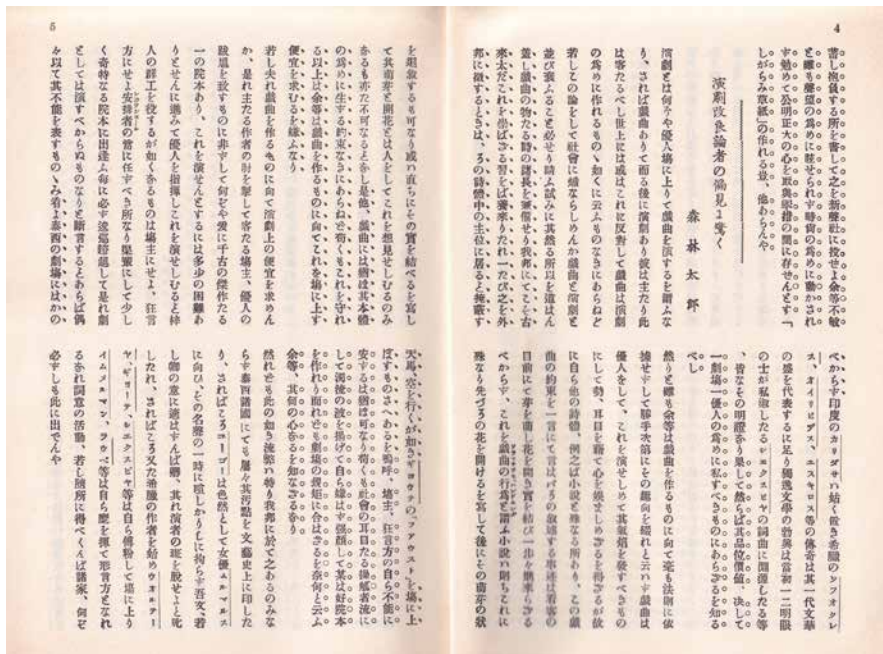
128

the journey ended in January 1920 with his translation of *The Pelican* by August Strindberg in the literary journal *Shirakaba* (*White Birch*). His literary life began and ended with plays; he translated more than fifty in all. But we must search

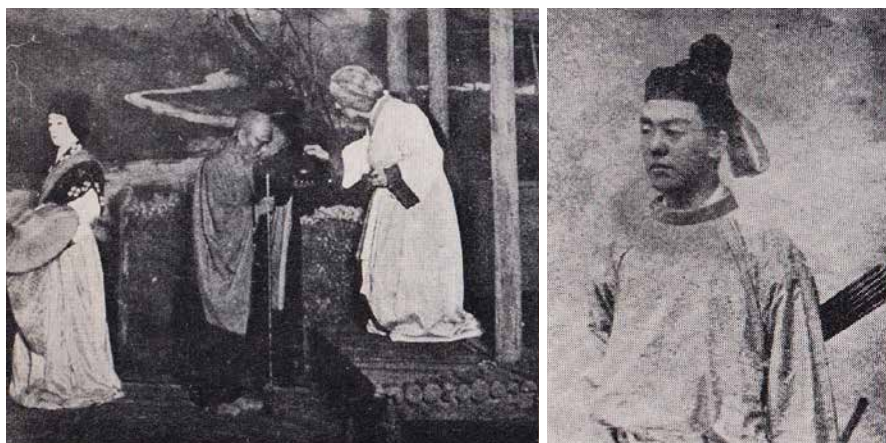


A description of *The Mayor of Zalamea* (*Shirabewatakeashi gitarura no hitofushi*) published in the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, newspaper dated January 3, 1889. Different Chinese characters are used for the title. Miki Takeji's name is printed next to Ogai's, indicating that they translated together.⁽²⁾

through the thirty-eight volumes of his collected works, published by Iwanami Shoten, to access them, which is why they are almost unknown. As well as translations, Ogai also published a thesis titled *Appalled by the Bias of the So-Called Theatre Improvers* (*Engekikairyoronja no henken ni odoroku*) in the first volume (released October 25, 1889) of the self-published literary magazine *Shigarami Soshi*, and he wrote one-act plays such as *Ikutagawa* (*Ikuta River*) as well. *Ikutagawa* was performed in the experimental production Jiyugekijo (Free Theatre) Part 2 in Yurakuza Theatre in May 1910. It was presented together with *The Court-Singer* by Frank Wedekind, translated by Mori Ogai, and *A Marriage Proposal* by Anton Chekhov, translated by Osanai Kaoru. Ogai played a leading role in popularizing the one-act play in Japan. It is always a challenge to describe the



Appalled by the Bias of the So-Called Theatre Improvers (*Engekikairyoronja no henken ni odoroku*), published in the literary magazine *Shigarami Soshi* Vol. 1, on October 25, 1889. The image used here is from the reissued version published by Rinsen Book Company in 1995. This was Ogai's first theatrical thesis. Ogai once wrote a thesis in German called *Über die Theaterfrage* (*Engekimondai ni tsuite*) for the German magazine *Von West nach Ost* Vol. 5 (May 1889 issue). This thesis went missing for a long time until it was discovered in 2018 in the Komaba Library of the University of Tokyo. The Japanese translation of this thesis and a commentary by author Itoda Soichiro are available in Meiji University Faculty of Literature Journal *Bungei Kenkyu* (*Literary Research*), Vol. 138, published in March 2019.



Ikutagawa (Ikuta River) from *Jiyugekijo (Free Theatre) Vol. 2*, performed in May 1910 at Yurakuza Theatre. (From the left) The first-generation Ichikawa Enjaku, who was later called Ichikawa Shocho, playing Ashiyaotome; the second-generation Ichikawa Sasho playing a monk; the first-generation Sawamura Sonosuke playing the mother of Otome; and the second-generation Ichikawa Sadanji playing Unaiotoko. Reprinted from *Guidebook to Shingeki Theatre in the Meiji-Taisho Era*, written and edited by Tanaka Eizo, p. 1 (published by Theatre Publishing Company in 1964).

theatrical reality of any era in the past, and due to lack of records, it has always been difficult to give a vivid picture of how Ogai's translations and creative works were crucial to the modernization of theatre at that time. That is why Ogai is not fully recognized as a theatre figure.

130

What We Learn from Ogai's Theatrical Theories

Ogai's theory of theatre, described in *Appalled by the Bias of the So-Called Theatre Improvers* and *The Poet behind the Theatre (Engekijori no shijin)*, was based on the theatrical reform that took place in the Court Theatre Munich at the end of the 1880s. Not only would you need to understand the Theatre Improvement Movement that took place in Japan, but you would also need to immerse yourself in German theatre records of the time in order to understand his writings. Ogai obtained information about the theatrical reform in Munich from local newspapers and magazines. His theories have not been fully researched to this day. The same can be said about his theses, *The Template of Theatre (Gekijo no hinagata)* (1890) and *The Size of Theatre (Gekijo no okisa)* (1897). Ogai studied in Germany for four years between 1884 and 1888. The 1880s were a special period for European theatre. A variety of diseases and large fires throughout

Europe led to an intense debate about protecting theatres. The fire that destroyed the Ringtheater in Vienna on December 8, 1881, caused a huge debate about how to keep theatres safe. There is an important article on this subject entitled “Theatre Design Competition” published in the *German Architecture Newspaper* on August 11, 1883. Ogai’s thesis *The Temple of Theatre*, published in *New Hygiene Magazine* Vol. 28, is based on this article. It is an enlightening work by Ogai, who also was a hygiene researcher. I believe that his ideas about the structure of theatres should be reacknowledged and viewed in a more global context, while reconstructing the conversations about hygiene and safe theatre environments from more than a hundred years ago.

The World of Ogai's Play Translations and Writings

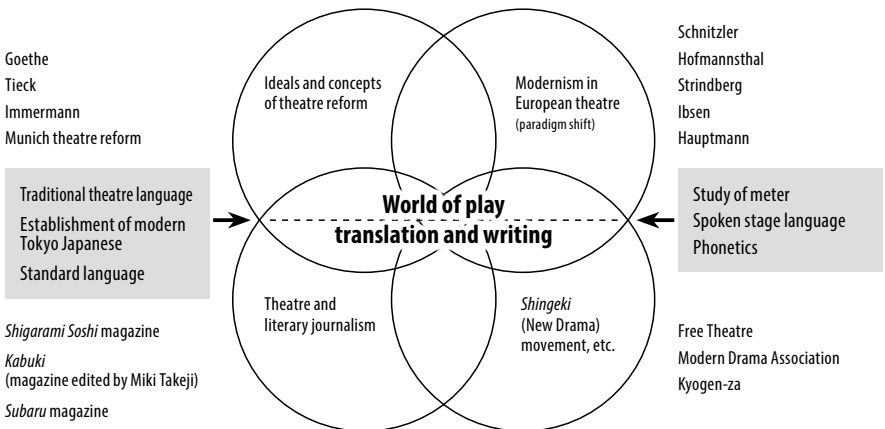
In order to see the full picture of the relationship between Ogai and the performing arts, you must divide his works into groups and see how these interact with each other. I have prepared a chart called *The World of Ogai's Play Translations and Writings* presenting a bird’s eye view. First, I have mapped out four different areas of theatre concepts with names and events relevant to each area. The area above the dotted line concerns theory. The area below concerns practice. I used dotted lines because the two cannot be divided completely. Here, where theory and practice overlap, is the most important zone for Ogai’s theatre translations and his original works. The upper-left area is related to his theses about theatre, which he published after coming back from Germany. This area includes the theatrical reform in Munich whose goal was to revive Shakespearean plays. Ogai wrote about how the Germans achieved an “open stage” environment while retaining prosceniums. He also emphasized the value of the *hanamichi* (platform runway) and the rotating stage of the kabuki theatre. A theatre engineer called Carl Lautenschläger came up with the idea of a “remodeled theatre” in Munich; in 1896 he was the first to introduce a rotating stage to Europe. Ogai had already stressed the importance of this design, and his foresight should be acknowledged. We should not forget that Ogai was the first person to introduce the *hanamichi* and the rotating stage to artistic discourse.

Ogai translated plays by Calderón de la Barca and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing while continuing to develop controversial theatrical theories. These are relevant to the publications in the lower left of the chart. *The Mayor of Zalamea* was published in the *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper using a seven-five-syllable meter. He used this form, common in kabuki theatre, intentionally to target theatregoers. He co-translated the play with his younger brother Mori Tokujiro (pen name Miki Takeji), who was familiar with kabuki idioms. It is important to note that *The Mayor of Zalamea* was published in a supplementary section of the newspaper—a nod towards the tradition of “reading” plays. In *Toriko (Philotas)* by Lessing, Ogai drew on the language used by high-ranking samurai warriors. It reminds us of a dialogue between a *tarokaja* (chief steward) and his Lord in *kyogen* (Japanese traditional comedy). This was a new experiment. *Toriko* was published in Ogai’s self-published literary magazine *Shigarami Soshi*, which seems to have been a useful instrument for experimenting freely with his translations.

132

Ogai served in the army during The First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). Afterwards, he was sent to Kokura in Northern Kyushu (1899–1902) and seems to have stopped working for the theatre. But since he moved to Kokura, he had

The World of Ogai's Play Translations and Writings



Created by the author. Revised from the chart first published in Meiji University Faculty of Literature Journal *Bungei Kenkyu (Literary Research)* Vol. 131, p. 64.

apparently been gathering information about new movements in European theatre and studying them thoroughly. As shown on the upper-right of the chart, Ogai translated a one-act play by Arthur Schnitzler called *The Lady with the Dagger*. This and other translations from 1907 onwards reflected the paradigm shift that occurred in the theatre industry in the beginning of the twentieth century. And this shift had a great impact on Tokyo's theatre world at that time, as shown in the lower-right of the chart. The translations of these new plays were published in theatre magazines such as *Kabuki* and *Subaru*, revitalizing the literary magazines of that period. After the publication of the textbook *Jinjoshogaku Tokuhon* in 1904, the language used therein became the standard Japanese terminology. This must have stimulated Ogai's appetite for translating foreign plays. Since Goethe's time, it had become a tradition in Germany to regard the language of the theatre as standard. Translations of foreign plays with a wide variety of subjects greatly enriched and broadened the possibilities of the Japanese language. We get a glimpse of Ogai inheriting the spirit of Goethe. Ogai was commissioned to translate Goethe's *Faust* by the Literary Committee of the Ministry of Education; it was part of an experimental project to translate classic foreign plays into contemporary Japanese. The first act of *Faust* was performed at the Imperial Theatre on March 27–31, 1913, hosted by the Modern Drama Association, and also at the Teikokuza Theatre in Osaka-Kitahama for ten days starting on May 1. We can see from the records that Ogai was making corrections to his translation while he communicated with the stage designer and the lighting artist. Classic plays presented in contemporary Japanese were in great demand among the intellectuals of the time.

Experimenting with His Own Plays

Ogai was the first to use contemporary Japanese in historical one-act plays. He confirms this himself saying, "I don't mean to brag about it, but I think my play *Shizuka* was the first period drama in contemporary language." Playwright Nagata Hideo once wrote that he exchanged a few words with a friend after seeing *Ikutagawa* in the second Jiyugekijo project. As they smoked a cigarette, Nagata said to his friend, "So from now on, we must write period dramas in

contemporary language.” His friend replied, “That is right. There is no point in using old language. It is our job as poets to create the old atmosphere using new language.” It explains how Ogai’s choice of language had a huge impact on the younger generation at that time.

Apparently, Ogai kept a close eye on the repertoire of the Deutsches Theater in Germany when choosing what to translate. The director of this theatre was Max Reinhardt, and his theatre led the theatrical reform movement that was happening all over Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1910, Reinhardt rented a circus tent for staging Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s version of the Greek play *Oedipus Rex*. In it, he built a Greek amphitheatre, in the middle of metropolitan Berlin. Ogai, who had a deep interest in this production, obtained the text of the Hofmannsthal adaptation. We have a record of him saying, “I am reading Hofmannsthal’s version of *Oedipus Rex* for a certain purpose.” He was working on *Soga Kyodai* (*The Soga Brothers*), an adaptation of a traditional Japanese play. The story of the Soga brothers was the basis of many theatrical productions. These were staged every year during the New Year season in prewar Japan, and most Japanese people were familiar with the story. Ogai made his own version of the story by boldly removing all kabuki elements from the kabuki script *Youchi soga kariba no akebono* (*The Night Attack of the Soga Brothers*) written by Kawatake Mokuami. It was presented in the Imperial Theatre by the Kyogen-za company in 1914, but it was not well received by the critics. The unyielding Ogai pointed to the global trend in adaptation but could not convince the critics to change their views.

Ogai’s original play *Tamakushige Futari Urashima* (*The Beautiful Box and the Two Urashimas*) was written in verse form using literary language. The verse was so lyrical and beautiful that people thought it was originally intended as an opera. He had previously experimented with a part of Henrik Ibsen’s verse tragedy *Brand*, giving it a verse translation in literary language with the title *Bokushi* (*The Priest*). The speculation that *Tamakushige Futari Urashima* was meant to be an opera must have made Ogai happy, as he often listened to Mozart

and Wagner when he was studying in Germany. Ogai denied that the text was written for an opera, but he hinted, in writing, at the possibility of turning the play into an opera, but only for presentation in an opera house with a deep-enough performing space and sufficiently talented singers.

To Sum Up

Ogai lived in a transition period when various forms of language still coexisted, and he cultivated new ways of presenting plays and performance. He had a deep knowledge of the theatrical movements in Europe at that time, and not only did he introduce European plays to Japan in eloquent translations, but he also created new types of plays using Japanese materials. We should reacknowledge his achievements as we celebrate the 160th anniversary of his birth and hundredth anniversary of his death.

Footnotes from the author

- (1) Even today, Ogai's novels are adapted into plays. The new-style kabuki production *Grandpa and Grandma (Jisan basan)*, first performed in 1951, directed and adapted by Uno Nobuo, is one of them.
- (2) An introduction with Ogai's name and honorific, a description of scenes, and the names of characters, are printed on this page. He began translating the play the day after this article was issued.

Itoda, Soichiro

Itoda Soichiro is an Emeritus professor at Meiji University and a former professor of German Literature of the Faculty of Literature of Meiji University. He was born in 1950, in Tokyo. He obtained a PhD at the Faculty of Literature of RWTH Aachen University. He specializes in German Modern Literature, Nietzsche, and Japan-Germany Cross-Cultural History. His books include *The Poet behind the Theatre—Understanding the Theatrical Theories of Ogai's Youth (Engekijori no Shijin Mori Ogai—Wakaki hi no engeki gekijoron wo yomu)* published by Keio University Press (2012) and *Berlin & Tokyo—Theater und Hauptstadt* published by Iudicium Verlag (2008).

(Translation: Ishikawa Mai and Donncha Crowley)



MUSICAL THE PRINCE OF TENNIS II The First Stage
©2009 TAKESHI KONOMI/2020 MUSICAL THE PRINCE OF TENNIS II PROJECT

Developments in Japan and Overseas

The 2.5-Dimensional Musical: An Audience-Creating System

Suzuki Kunio

“2.5-Dimensional Musicals” draw on anime and manga to create new audiences distinct from traditional theatre-going segments. According to the Pia Research Institute, in 2018 the 2.5-Dimensional Musical industry grew 45% from the previous year to reach ¥22.6 billion in size, with more than 200 new and ongoing productions staged that year. At Japonismes 2018 in Paris, the musical *Touken Ranbu* and the performance show “*Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon*” *The Super Live* brought the 2.5-Dimensional Musical

model to an international audience.

This essay by Suzuki Kunio explores the origin and history of the 2.5-Dimensional Musical and considers some unique characteristics of its performance model and staging.

—The Editors

The Japan 2.5-Dimensional Musical Association was founded in March 2014. Its home page defines 2.5-Dimensional Musicals as “theatrical presentations based on Japanese manga, popular animation and video games.” The term, the association explains, places these shows somewhere between the 2D “realm of manga, animation and video games” and the 3D “realm of the theatre,” and is used not just for actual musicals but also for “plays, comedies and dramas” with no musical elements.* The word is used among the fans who began to follow this genre closely at an early stage.

The term “2.5-Dimensional Musical” is deeply related to the establishment and history of the genre. It is no coincidence that the 2.5-Dimensional Musical was born of Japan’s theatrical culture, and as a performance model it enjoys enduring popularity and contains much potential for future development. Let us begin by examining its roots.

The theatrical arts are a three-dimensional phenomenon, brought into being when performer and audience share time and space. However, across ages and cultures, it is far from uncommon to see two-dimensional—in other words, picture-like—ideas projected onto them. In ancient Greek tragedy, masked actors caused characters from myth and epic poetry to appear before the audience. From medieval mystery plays to the once-a-decade performance of the Passion Play in modern-day Oberammergau, Germany, audiences have been moved by seeing Christ, Mary, and the saints with their own eyes. The addition of musical elements created opera, the flower of European theatrical culture, which brought heroes to the stage again and again. One might argue that precursors of the 2.5-Dimensional Musical predominate throughout the history of the theatrical arts.

In Japan, too, performing arts from Noh to Bunraku, Kabuki to Kumiodori, have drawn themes and material from classical literature and enriched them

with visual arts and music. In the classic “two-act phantasmal Noh” (*fukushiki mugen no*) genre, the *shite* (lead actor) appears before the audience masked and costumed as a character from a tale or picture scroll. The outlandishly attired *kabukimono* (“crooked ones”) of the early modern period, arguably cosplayers in their way, were the forerunners of Kabuki (reanalyzed as *ka*, song, *bu*, dance, and *ki*, performance), in which distinctive costuming, makeup, and gestural styles would eventually bring superheroes to the stage. On-stage imagery was depicted in ukiyo-e, and these ukiyo-e were then recreated and transfigured by actors. It should come as no surprise that in more modern times this tradition would give rise to bromides (promotional photographs), toy figures, cosplay, manga, anime, and games, which then found audiences worldwide.

Animation combines two-dimensional pictures—in which humans have near godlike powers of creation—with movement, time, and speech, and it is clear that the unique appeal of today’s 2.5-dimensional works lies in the representation of animation using the human body as a created thing with its own limitations.

From *The Rose of Versailles* to *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon*: A Prehistory of 2.5-Dimensional Musicals

By the latter half of the twentieth century, theatrical productions based on manga had already been staged. Eri Chiemi’s starring role in *Sazae-san* is one case of a natural connection between a widely beloved cartoon character and a star’s popular persona.

The all-female Takarazuka Revue Company’s *The Rose of Versailles*, first staged in 1974, took this process one step further, opening new possibilities. Though produced many years before the term “2.5-dimensional” was coined, in retrospect *The Rose of Versailles* is sometimes called the dawn of the 2.5-Dimensional Musical. Some opposed the very idea of adapting Ikeda Riyoko’s monumentally popular manga for the stage, concerned that this would undermine their personal conception of the story. However, the finished product was so polished that audiences could only marvel in wonder. It became one of Takarazuka’s most popular works and has been revived multiple times.

Costumed dramas set in Europe had long been a specialty for Takarazuka, and the company's *otoko-yaku* (actors specializing in male roles) were ideally suited to the role of Oscar, a "female beauty in male attire" (*danso no reijin*). However, in an age when manga as a genre did not have the high degree of social recognition it does today, Takarazuka's sincere efforts to perfect every aspect of the adaptation, from staging and art direction to the finer points of the performance itself, brought even greater success than expected. The company successfully brought characters that seemed to have "stepped out of a picture" to life, and in so doing created what we can see as the starting point of the 2.5-dimensional approach.

The Rose of Versailles would only be the first of Takarazuka's superb productions based on manga. In 2018, *The Poe Clan*, based on Moto Hagio's manga of the same name, overcame restrictions ranging from the intense imagery of the original work to the fact that the characters played by the top *otoko-yaku* stars were all young boys to win rave reviews from critics, who noted that the production gave the impression that the actors had merged with the manga's original images.

Other works that attracted attention after *The Rose of Versailles* include *Saint Seiya* (1991), starring then-recently-formed all-male band SMAP; *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon* (1993–2005); and the *Sakura Taisen Kayou Show* (1997–2006), based on a video game whose voice actors were cast specifically with the goal of later theatrical adaptation. The Shiki Theatre Company has also staged musicals based on animated movies, such as *The Lion King*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *The Little Mermaid*.

However, Takarazuka and Shiki are both companies with long histories, established reputations, and diverse repertoires. Accordingly, even works based on manga, anime, and games, which could arguably be called 2.5-Dimensional Musicals, seem more appropriately categorized as part of their respective repertoires. In the same way, I would prefer to place the stage adaptation of *One Piece* performed by kabuki actors under the general category of kabuki.



"Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon" The Super Live at Japonismes 2018
©T·P/SMTSL



Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon:
Eternal Edition, Vol. 1 ©Naoko Takeuchi

Musical: The Prince of Tennis—

140 Creating a Model for 2.5-Dimensional Productions

The theatrical adaptation which deserves recognition as the starting point for the 2.5-Dimensional Musical genre, recently established and rapidly developing and evolving, is *Musical: The Prince of Tennis* (2003–). “TenniMu,” as fans refer to it, is based on a long-running manga by Konomi Takeshi, serialized in *Weekly Shonen Jump* (Shueisha), about a junior high school tennis club. The story is almost entirely about teams of tennis players displaying near-superhuman playing technique in a series of matches and tournaments against each other. When adapting manga for the stage, selecting the right elements from the often-voluminous original to create a coherent, self-contained work of limited length is always a challenge. “TenniMu” resolved this by limiting each production to the central team’s matches against a particular set of opponents, along with related story beats. The continuation of the story was left to the next production. Through this “serialized production” approach, over a period of several years the entire original work was brought to the stage successfully.

The innovation of this production model is one reason for positing “TenniMu” as the pioneering 2.5-Dimensional Musical. The model allowed an

enormous original work to be adapted for the stage with nothing left out; and by ending each production in a way that leaves the audience eager to see the next, it recreated the experience of enjoying a serialized manga. Because the story is entirely about tennis, with a core team constantly facing new opponents, this structure can provide consistency and variation at the same time. Vast numbers of characters appear as the productions progress, all with unique personalities and skills to put to the test against each other; at the conclusion of each work, scenes of victory and loss provide catharsis even as they lay the groundwork for the next dramatic situation. The production drew fans of the original work to the theatre and expanded its audience by bringing them new forms of joy; at the same time, the structure had the expected effect of turning audience members into “regulars”—like manga readers who buy every issue of the magazine carrying their favorite serial—who shared information about the work and brought in new fans as



The Prince of Tennis, Vol. 1
©Konomi Takeshi/Shueisha

MUSICAL THE PRINCE OF TENNIS Absolute King RIKKAI feat.ROKKAKU ~Second Service
©1999 TAKESHI KONOMI/©2007 SHUEISHA, NAS, THE PRINCE OF TENNIS PROJECT
©1999 TAKESHI KONOMI /2007 SHUEISHA, Marvelous Entertainment, NELKE PLANNING



well. In the case of “TenniMu,” once the entire original is performed, a new “season” starts again from the beginning of the story. A separate production has also begun based on the original manga’s sequel, *The Prince of Tennis II*. There can be no doubt that this aspect of the “TenniMu” model also contributed to the expansion of the 2.5-Dimensional Musical.

Auditions and Casting to Uncover New Talent

Another important aspect of the “TenniMu” model was fully audition-based casting. In order to recreate the appearance and characteristics of the 2-dimensional manga characters as faithfully as possible, the producers held auditions seeking young men able to play the part of middle-school tennis players. Actors were selected purely on their success at or potential for recreating characters, with no regard paid to their previous careers. This allowed the show to assemble a distinctive and fresh cast. All the actors were young and handsome, with strong appeal for the young women who made up the majority of the production’s audience.

142

The effort and preparation required to approach the imagery of the original is also far greater in “TenniMu” than for a traditional role. Because the work is a musical, all actors have to learn singing, dancing, and performance techniques, whatever their background, along with tennis form. Above all, in order to express the characters just as they were depicted in the manga, actors are expected to merge completely with their parts, not only through superficial details such as hair, makeup, and tennis technique, but at the deepest level. Even then, a certain degree of inexperience and earnestness became part of the show’s initial appeal, and the development of the cast as more performances were held became another element delighting audiences. New casting is required for each new set of opponents, and after a certain number of performances the core team also “graduates” and makes way for new members. The constant parade of new faces makes it even harder for fans to look away.

Another factor in the series’ success was the creation of on-stage excitement through simple but freely moving sets, laser shows and sound effects, choreography that raised actions like swinging a racquet to the level of dance, and

innovative staging that rendered the supernatural technique of the characters visible. This magical staging is arguably another essential element for the 2.5-Dimensional Musical, alongside the “2.5-dimensionality” of “pictures come to life.” The “TenniMu model” was applied and further developed for a range of material, and is viewed as the secret underlying the genre’s current flourishing.

2.5-Dimensional Musicals have also introduced a diverse range of stars, including Shirota Yū and Saitō Takumi, who became active in many fields after their “graduation” from “TenniMu.” Of late, we have witnessed the advent of actors who appear in multiple 2.5-dimensional productions, exhibiting a unique presence. This hints at new potential for methodologies of performance and direction alike, and developments in this area will surely answer the question of whether or not 2.5-dimensional theatre can be permanently established as a theatrical genre.



“Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon” The Super Live at Japonismes 2018
©Naoko Takeuchi · PNP/“Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon” The Super Live Production Committee

Notes

* <https://www.j25musical.jp/en/> (access date: February 4, 2022)

There is a contradiction in calling works that contain no music “musicals,” and there are some cases where “musicals” and “spoken theatre” are performed based on the same material, so at present “2.5-dimensional theatre” is perhaps most appropriate.

Suzuki, Kunio

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(Translation: Matt Treyvaud)



SPECIAL FEATURE "Theatre Born in Conflict Zones 13"

Special Feature

Theatre Born in Conflict Zones 13

Five Highly Dense Short Films

Tanioka Takehiko

I was somewhat surprised to learn that the 2021 entry in the “Theatre Born in Conflict Zones” series would be an American production, because I had imagined this series as featuring dramatizations of countries such as Israel, Palestine, and Syria, countries that are currently experiencing, or have recently experienced, large-scale military conflicts. I understood the reason for this, however, after learning that the work was related to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the fight against the spread of COVID-19 has become, in a sense, something like a war even in Japan. Last summer, when there was talk of setting up temporary medical facilities should the number of infected people surge and cause a shortage of hospital beds, the media referred to such facilities as “field hospitals.” Such imagery didn’t stop with language. The Japan Self-Defense Forces managed operations of large-scale vaccination centers in Tokyo and Osaka. In the US, where the numbers of infections and fatalities far exceed those in Japan, the experience must be even farther removed from normality.

146

Background of the Works

The *Viral Monologues* works featured in this exhibition were planned as a response to the closure of New York’s theaters in March 2020 due to the spread of COVID. The producers are a group called The 24 Hour Plays. Since its founding in 1995, the company has been known for its unique activity of bringing together playwrights and actors to write, rehearse, and perform plays within a twenty-four hour period. In the *Viral Monologues* works, the 24 Hour Plays staff remotely connected writers and actors with the playwrights writing monologues by 9:00 a.m. the next day and giving actors until 6:00 p.m. to film their

performance using a smartphone or the like. Starting with their first uploaded film on March 17, by the end of that month they already had sixty completed performances. I suspect that their use of “viral” in the title straddles the dual meanings of “being related to a virus” and “being widely shared on the Internet.” This is not to say that every entry in this series went Internet viral, but some have had over 20,000 views, and new entries in the series were still being uploaded as of October 2021.

A book has also been published, containing in a single volume the scripts for most of the first sixty videos that were released. Five of these were selected for creation as a Japanese production. I’m sure there was debate among the organizers regarding the most appropriate format for presenting these works to a Japanese audience. Setting aside considerations of what the infection situation might be in Japan at the time of a scheduled performance, they likely considered the option of presenting them as theatrical works, like the pre-COVID series entries. Given a director, rehearsals with the actors, and the use of stage lighting and sound, I’m sure they could have put on some spectacular performances. In exchange for such perfection, however, the enjoyable roughness of the original work, a result of its being written and performed in such a limited time, would be lost. Indeed, one of the aims of *Viral Monologues* is to allow actors to freely interpret and express a playwright’s words without the intervention of a director. In the end, they gave translated scripts to five actors who were each told to act them out in whatever way they thought best—a wise decision by the organizers, I think.

Of course, being given so much discretion may have been both a joy and a burden for the actors. In particular, the monologues in these films were, as described above, written with a particular actor in mind. In other words, all five actors in these Japanese versions were given lines intended to be spoken by someone else. How should they deal with such words? Should they do their best to make them their own? Or should they allow for some distance, presenting them as the words of another? Such differing approaches by each actor toward their script is another highlight.



This Trip
Written by Charlie O'Leary,
starring Kumakawa Ryuichi

This Trip

Let's take a look at each film in the order in which they were shown at the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre Atelier West. First was *This Trip* by Charlie O'Leary, played by Kumakawa Ryuichi. This is a monologue by a man who has traveled with his family amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The composition of this film is particularly interesting, with one camera filming a man who is in turn using his smartphone to film himself talking to a bathroom mirror. This man is extremely conscious of how others view him. He insists that his trip is not something that can be subject to criticism, because during it he left big tips at restaurants, helping restaurants who have been so hurt by the pandemic.

Amidst his claims of blamelessness, however, he starts to cough. Here, Kumagawa coughs long and harshly, showing that his coughs are no mere clearing of the throat. He turns off the phone he's using to film himself, and having thus removed himself from the public eye he faces the mirror and scolds himself for being so foolish and selfish. As it turns out, he has been infected and is now self-isolating; his eloquent descriptions of his trip are nothing but empty rationalizations for his behavior. It was a fine work, revealing how the consumption behavior we want to refer to as "revitalizing the economy" is nothing but selfish folly.

Unknown Caller

Next was Dan O'Brien's *Unknown Caller*, played by Goto Yurina. It takes the form of a video message from a daughter to her mother who is on her deathbed

due to COVID-induced pneumonia. The speaker received a call that morning from an unlisted number, telling her that her mother, with whom she has been long estranged, was in critical condition but that visitations are not possible. The long blank in communications between them suggests that their relationship was not a good one. By including occasional pauses in the monologue to indicate her swallowing her anger, Goto conveys a complex blend of emotions.

The daughter feels that her mother has not loved her for a long time. When she faced various difficulties five years before, she says, her mother didn't send her so much as an email, and forgiving such a mother is not something that she can easily do. She even refuses to show her mother pictures of her daughter, in other words her mother's grandchild, who she is raising with her same-sex spouse. However, it is precisely because of this continued venting of frustrations toward her mother that the one time she calls her "Mom," something that occurs at the end of her monologue, feels so emotionally impactful. If, that is, she works up the courage to hit "send" and actually deliver the message to her mother.



Unknown Caller

Written by Dan O'Brien, starring Goto Yurina

Thank You for Visiting Me

Zhu Yi's *Thank You for Visiting Me* is unique in how the camera is used. It begins when the speaker, a woman who has been on a cruise, returns home. Upon her return, she encounters something unexpected: her dog, who is supposed to be



Thank You for Visiting Me
Written by Zhu Yi, starring Inoue Kanako

dead, is there in her room. She speaks to this canine ghost, telling it how her husband contracted COVID on the cruise ship and how she was unable to take care of him in his final days because he was quarantined. The camera gives us the point-of-view of the dog to which she is speaking.

Actor Inoue Kanako dared to ignore those directions, instead shooting her video while reading not only the dialogue to the camera, but also the stage directions. In doing so, she leaves how the script should be acted out to the viewer's imagination, dedi-

cating herself solely to the role of conveying the playwright's words as they are. I experienced some amount of frustration at not being able to see the scene from the dog's point-of-view. Inoue's decision to simply read the stage directions makes sense, however, especially considering the ending, which has the dog flying out of an open window, leaving things in the original version of the video a bit opaque.

Invincible

Invincible was written by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, based on interviews with a nurse working in New York City. In this film, actor Kate Doi goes to extremes in making the script her own, possibly based on a line in the script describing her as having just completed seventy hours of work that week. Doi faces the camera wearing a nurse's uniform. Her expression shows clear signs of fatigue.

Her story begins with why she decided to become a nurse, and naturally transitions to the current situation, where the number of patients hospitalized due to COVID infections is rapidly increasing. She is limited to spending at most ten minutes in hospital room, and so finds being unable to talk to her patients difficult. Doi stumbles in her words and turns away from the camera when she has something difficult to say, making her performance realistic. She speaks with

gradually increasing heat. She is angry with the government for being unable to supply her with masks and protective gear, and at times, she cannot contain her anger at those who think they are “invincible” against the virus and thus fail to take precautions



Invincible
Written by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, starring Kate Doi

against infection. “We need to take care of each other more. I hope that we learn to love each other more,” her monologue concludes, leaving a deep impression.

The Hardest Part

The last film, Howard Sherman’s *The Hardest Part*, features Hirata Mitsuru. The monologue is by an Asian man worried about his son, who is hospitalized with a serious injury. By reading his lines without any excess emotion, Hirata’s tone makes the anxiety of a worried father all the more evident.

Amidst the continued spread of COVID infections, his son went to the grocery store to shop for him because he is elderly and has high blood pressure.



The Hardest Part
Written by Howard Sherman,
starring Hirata Mitsuru

During that excursion, he is attacked by thugs who shout things like “Chinese virus!” and “Go back to your country!” as they beat him. He wants to visit his son in the hospital, but due to infection prevention measures only patients are allowed in the hospital. All he can do is pray for safety to the guardian angel statue his son once gave him as a gift. This father laments about how discrimination against Asians, which had seemed to finally have become a thing of the past, has reappeared with the virus, and this resonated with me long after I finished watching the video.

What Makes These Apt Inclusions as “Theatre Born in Conflict Zones”

While there were only five short videos, each was very dense and covered a wide range of subjects. If I were to try to extract a motif that runs through the entire collection, I would have to look to a line by Howard Sherman, the creator of *The Hardest Part*: “This is an evil that ... maybe was revealed because of the virus.” The core of the drama in each film is how emotions, both love and hatred, that tend to be suppressed beneath the surface of social life in normal times, can erupt during times of emergency. These are thus short films worthy of consideration as “Theatre Born in Conflict Zones.”

I would also like to say something about the translations. I heard that Tsukisawa Rikako was chosen to translate the scripts because she attended the World Theatre Lab, hosted by the Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute. I also heard that while she is a highly experienced translator, this was her first time translating theatrical scripts. Regardless, she produced high-quality translations, making for an excellent debut in this field. I would thus like to close with a special mention of Ms. Tsukisawa’s fine translation work, and the translator training program at the Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute for their support of her efforts.

Tanioka, Takehiko

Born in 1965. Professor at the Institute for Liberal Arts at the Tokyo Institute of Technology, specializing in contemporary British theatre. His publications include *Notes on Contemporary British Theatre* (Gendai igirisu engeki dansho, Camomile-sha). He translated David Greig’s *The Events* for the New National Theatre of Tokyo, 2019. He is a member of the Association of Haiku Poets and author of the haiku collection *Youthful Writings* (Wakagaki, Honami Shoten).

(Translation: Tony Gonzalez)

The Theatre Born in Conflict Zones Series

Centers of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) around the world have been contributing to a project called *Theatre Born in Conflict Zones* as an attempt to foster peace through theatre. The Japanese Centre of ITI started its version of this project in 2009 as part of the study and research process for publication of its *Theatre Yearbook*. The series has continued for thirteen years, presenting translations of twenty-eight prominent plays that were previously unknown in Japan, reading performances, lectures by authors and experts, and exhibitions. Scripts for the presented plays have been published since the third year of the series. If you wish to obtain current or back issues of the *Theatre Yearbook*, which include the play scripts, please contact the Japanese Centre of ITI.

Performance Record

“Theatre Born in Conflict Zones 13”

Five entries from *Viral Monologues* (2020) by The 24 Hour Plays, showing and discussion
December 11 (Sat)–12 (Sun), 2021

Venue: Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre Atelier West (B1)

*Pre-recorded streaming (paid): January 17 (Mon) 10:00–January 23 (Sun) 23:59, 2022

Works Shown:

This Trip

Written by Charlie O’Leary, starring Kumakawa Ryuichi (Rappaya)

Unknown Caller

Written by Dan O’Brien, starring Goto Yurina (Haiyuza Theatre Company)

Thank You for Visiting Me

Written by Zhu Yi, starring Inoue Kanako (Aru Company)

Invincible

Written by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen, starring Kate Doi

The Hardest Part

Written by Howard Sherman, starring Hirata Mitsuru (Aru Company)

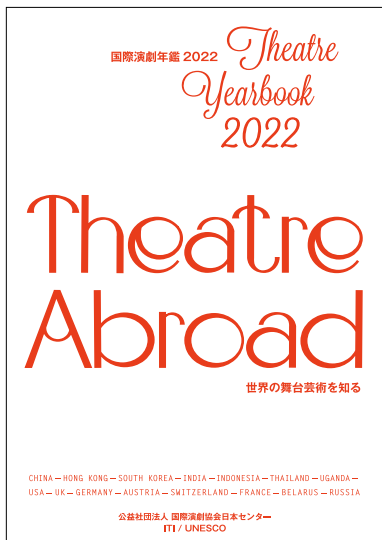
Discussions of Each Work

December 11: Takenaka Kyoko (actor)

December 12: Tonooka Naomi (Professor at Aoyama Gakuin University, specializing in American theater)



Japanese translations of the five exhibited *Viral Monologues* have been published as a supplement to *Theatre Yearbook 2022*. If you would like to read the scripts or obtain a copy, please contact the Japanese Centre of ITI (mail@iti-j.org).



Companion Volume *Theatre Abroad* 2022 (Japanese)

These articles do not appear in
Theatre in Japan 2022.

World Theatre Day Message by Peter Sellars

Theatre in Asia and Africa

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| China | The Curtain Rises on the Post-COVID Era and
100 Years of the Communist Party of China ————— Tamura Yoko |
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Theatre in the Americas and Oceania

USA Healing Divisions and Moving toward Change ————— Tonooka Naomi

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UK A Year of Gradual Re-Emergence ————— Natasha Tripney

**Germany /
Austria /
Switzerland** A Winter of Endurance, a Spring of Joy ————— Hagiwara Ken

France Living through an Endless Pandemic:
An Unclear Future, a Historic Moment ————— Fujii Shintaro

Belarus Surviving Oppression: Belarus Free Theatre's Decisive Year ————— Nicolai Khalezin

Russia A "Relaunched" Theatre and Dostoevsky at 200 ————— Shinozaki Naoya

Developments in Japan and Overseas

TPAM's Achievements, YPAM's Aspirations: Building an International Platform
for the Contemporary Performing Arts ——— Maruoka Hiromi (Interviewer: Fujiwara Chikara, Nakajima Kana)

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International Theatre Institute (ITI) is an NGO under the umbrella of UNESCO and has some ninety branch centres around the world.

ITI Japanese Centre, which was founded in 1951, has been commissioned by the Agency for Cultural Affairs to edit and publish the *Theatre Yearbook* every March since 1972.

The *Theatre Yearbook*, which consists of two volumes, is globally distributed free of charge to various performing arts organizations, university libraries, cultural departments of embassies and so on.

One volume, titled “Theatre abroad” (in Japanese), targets Japanese reader and features articles by experts on various countries, explaining each country's performing arts-related affairs over a span of one year.

The other volume, which targets international readers, is titled “Theatre in Japan” (in English) and discusses ten genres of performing arts-related affairs of Japan, from traditional to contemporary performing arts, plus television dramas.

If you have any comments or requests regarding *Theatre Yearbook*, please contact our centre and give us your feedback.

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Obituary: Betsuyaku Minoru "Under the Influence of Beckett: Betsuyaku, Pinter, Stoppard"

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– *Unknown Caller* by Dan O’Brien
– *Thank You for Visiting Me* by Zhu Yi
– *Invincible* by Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen
– *The Hardest Part* by Howard Sherman

2018 *Khail Taiha (Lost Horses)* by Adnan Alaoda (Syria)
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2019 *Common Ground* by Yael Ronen (Israel/Germany) & Ensemble
This Is War by Hannah Moscovitch (Canada)

2020 *Liberian Girl* by Diana Nneka Atuona (UK)

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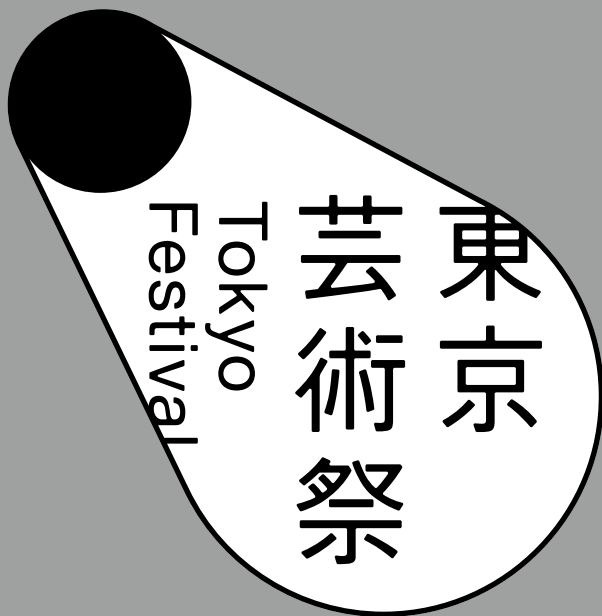
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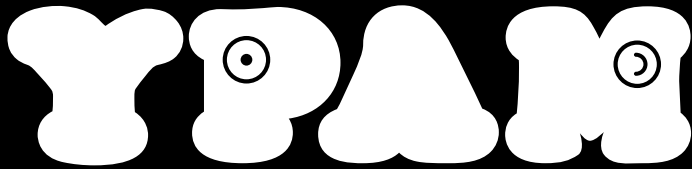
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