

国際演劇年鑑 2020 *Theatre*
Yearbook
2020

Theatre in Japan

日本の舞台芸術を知る

NOH and KYOGEN – KABUKI – BUNRAKU – MUSICAL – 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 2020 Theatre in Japan

Published in March, 2020

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Foreword

The Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute has become a public interest incorporated foundation and is a member of an international network comprised of National Centres and professional organizations in approximately ninety countries and regions constituting 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”. In Article 3 of the standing rules of the Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute, it is stipulated 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 creations and exchanges of theatre and dance based upon the purpose of the UNESCO Constitution”.

Creation and appreciation of theatrical and dance performances encourage us to take interest in one another and think about people and society by sharing time and space together. Even in today’s society, where electronic media have dramatically increased the volume and speed of the distribution of information, the role of theatre and dance that help us gain multifaceted and deep insights will not diminish. Their role will rather increase all the more.

The Japanese Centre has continued to publish the Theatre Yearbook since 1972. Starting from 1997, it has been published in two parts, namely ‘Theatre in Japan’ (English version) for readers outside Japan and ‘Theatre Abroad’ (Japanese version) for domestic readers. From 2011, the Centre has been commissioned by the Agency for Cultural Affairs to carry out the publication project under the ‘Program for Nurturing Upcoming Artists Leading the Next Generation’.

Furthermore, reading performances have been presented every year since 2009 to introduce remarkable plays from around the world as part of research and study activity to promote international theatrical exchange. In 2016, the ‘Theatre Born in Conflict Zones’ series was held for the tenth consecutive year and two new plays from Israel/Germany and Canada were translated and introduced to Japan for the first time.

Thus the publication of the ‘Theatre Yearbook’ has laid a firm foundation for actual activities 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, 2020

In commemoration of World Theatre Day

Nagai Taeko
President

Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute

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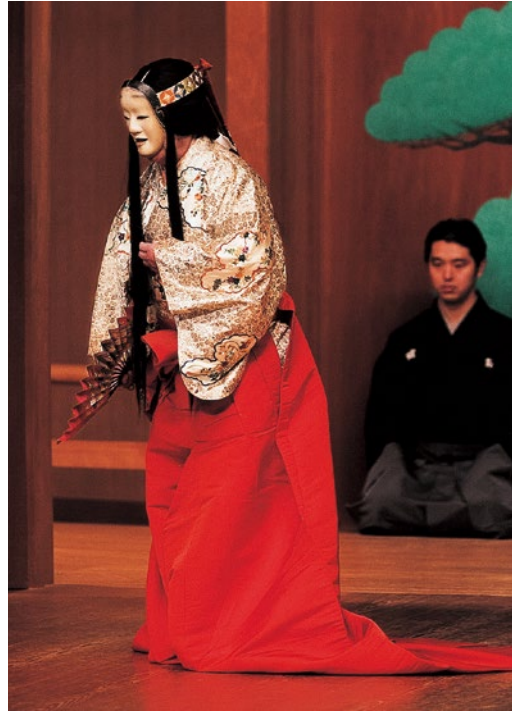
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**Shots from the Performing Arts in Japan
in 2019**

Noh and Kyogen





Ukifune Asami Masakuni © Tojo Mutsuko



Izutsu (The Well) Tomoeda Akiyo © Maejima Yoshihiro

Noh and Kyogen



Rashomon Tonoda Kenkichi © Narita Yukio



Soraude (The Brave Coward) Nomura Man (front) © Yoshikoshi Ken



Uchizata (The Trial Rehearsal) (from the left) Nomura Mansaku and Nomura Mansai © Masakawa Shinji



Futaribakama (Two-in-One Hakama) (from the left) Yamamoto Rintaro, Yamamoto Tojiro, Yamamoto Noritoshi © Yoshikoshi Ken

Kabuki



Himejijo Oto ni Kiku Sono Ishizue (Protecting the Foundation of Himeji Castle and its Clan) Onoe Kikugoro

© National Theatre



Igagoe Dochu Sugoroku — Numazu

Nakamura Kichiemon (right) Nakamura Karoku (left)

© Shochiku



Koibikyakū Yamato Orai — Fuin Giri
(Breaking the Seals) Kataoka Nizaemon (left)
 Kataoka Takataro (right) © Shochiku



Tsukiakari Mezasu Furusato — Fuunji-tachi (Heroes of Turbulent Times) © Shochiku

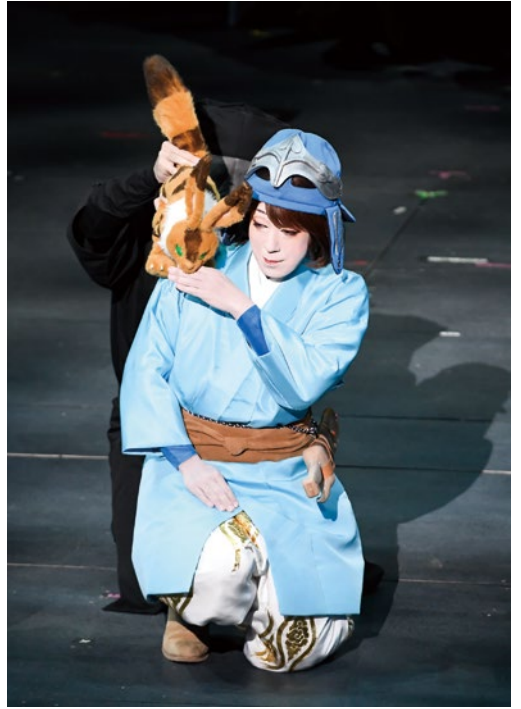
Kabuki



Ehon Ushiwakamaru (Ushiwakamaru's Picture Book) Onoe Kikunosuke (left) Onoe Ushinosuke (center) © Shochiku



Meiboku Sendai Hagi Nakamura Shichinosuke (center) © Shochiku



Kaze no Tani no Nausicaä (Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind)
Onoe Kikunosuke © Shochiku



Shinpan Oguri Ichikawa Ennosuke (right) Bando Shingo (left)
© Shochiku

Bunraku



Imoseyama Onna Teikin (Husband and Wife Mountains, a Moral Guide for Women — Imoseyama)

© National Theatre and Ningyō joruri Bunraku-za



Kanadehon Chushingura Act III (The Treasury of 47 Loyal Retainers — The Fight in the Palace)

© National Bunraku Theatre and Ningyō joruri Bunraku-za



Kanadehon Chushingura Act VII (The Treasury of 47 Loyal Retainers — The Gion Ichiriki Teahouse)

© National Bunraku Theatre and Ningyo joruri Bunraku-za



Kanadehon Chushingura Act IX (The Treasury of 47 Loyal Retainers — Yuranosuke's Villa in Yamashina)

© National Bunraku Theatre and Ningyo joruri Bunraku-za

Bunraku



Ichinotani Futaba Gunki — Kumagai Jinya (A Chronicle of the Battle of Ichinotani — Kumagai's Battle Camp)

© National Theatre and Ningyo joruri Bunraku-za



Hibariyama Himesute no Matsu (Mt. Hibari and the Pine of the Abandoned Princess) Princess Chujo by Yoshida Minosuke

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Musicals



FACTORY GIRLS — *My Story* Amuse, Inc. © Oka Chisato



One Fine Day conSept © Ando Takeshi

Musicals



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An American in Paris Shiki Theatre Company © Shimosaka Atsutoshi



Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812 © Toho Theatrical Division



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Musicals



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Contemporary Theatre



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Contemporary Theatre



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Sweat Seinenza Theatre Company © Sakamoto Masafumi

Contemporary Theatre



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All People Are Average People Match Point © Takeda Mayuko



Greeks Kanagawa Arts Theatre (KAAT) © bozzo



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Children's and Youth Theatre



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Circus Lights La Strada Company © Studio Horiike



The Oil-Hell Murder Puppet Theater La CLARTE © Tajima Satoshi

Japanese Classical Dance



Mizukagami (The Water Mirror) Inoue Korin (right) and Inoue Mameryo (left) © National Theatre



Sari Yuku Koya (The Theater Goes Away) Fujima Kiyotsugu © Yokoyama Hajime



Kitsune Kuzunoha (Fox Kuzunoha) Bando Fukiko © Mai Video



Ryukyu Buyo *Kashikaki* Chinen Masaru © Motohashi Ayumi (STAFF TESS)

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Sylvia Inoue Ballet Company © Matsuura Ayako (STAFF TESS)



Don Quijote Ballet Chambre Ouest © Kobayashi Masayuki



Yoshida Miyako's retirement performance *Last Dance*
The Mirror Walkers (Yoshida Miyako and Irek Mukhamedov)
 © Hasegawa Kiyonori



Madame Butterfly K-Ballet Company © Seto Hidemi

Ballet



The Sleeping Beauty (Morishita Yoko)
Matsuyama Ballet ©AI



Romeo and Juliet Sadamatsu Hamada Ballet © Furuto Eiji (Tess Osaka)

Contemporary Dance and Butoh



Hearing the Voice of the Sea of Life National Theatre © National Theatre



Arc Sankai Juku © Sankai Juku

Contemporary Dance and Butoh



Forgetful Angel – Paul Klee's Hand Teshigawara Saburo and Sato Rihoko © Miura Mariko



Rhymes of Soil Kitamura Akiko Cross Transit project © Daido Hiroyasu



phantom idevian crew © Kaneko Manaho



Don't Stop Me Now Condors © HARU

Contemporary Dance and Butoh



Experimental Dance vol.1 **R.O.O.M.** Noism1 © Shinoyama Kishin



no room Hala Saori © Kimura Kazuhei

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The Japanese Performing Arts
in 2019

Noh and Kyogen

Veteran Performers Reveal Modernity in the Classics

Oda Sachiko

The Barrier of Abstrusity

A perennial issue within classical performing arts is its abstrusity. Amongst those arts, the Noh theatre, originating in the ancient Muromachi era, presents particular challenges such as its masks and ancient language which make it hard for audiences to make out the words, whilst physical action is limited. One need not be a neophyte to find oneself at a loss, as to what to look out for, and how. In addition, performances are strictly once-only events— if you miss something, you have missed it for good. Performances are on the increase, yet there is a struggle to draw audiences, perhaps with the exception of programmes presented by the National Noh Theatre. The general audience base is fixed and aging, representing a long-standing point of concern which has remained unresolved.

What can the Noh theatre do, to overcome the barrier of abstrusity, and to appeal to a wider audience? One solution to aiding the audience's comprehension has been the introduction, since 2006, of Japanese and English subtitles at the National Noh Theatre, which last year celebrated its 35th anniversary. The use of subtitles

has also been spreading to other theatres such as the Kyoto Kanze Association, and the Yokohama Noh Theatre. Further, performing organisations and individuals have been diligent in their efforts to “modernize the classics,” as seen in the year-on-year increase in workshops and pre-performance talks, along with innovative projects, collaborations and joint performances with other genres. To take an example from November-December 2018, the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre presented *3D Noh Extreme*, an event experienced through 3D glasses, presenting Noh in an altogether new light. The use of moving images remains an unknown quantity, yet there is room here for development in the future.

Among the new programmes which stood out in 2019, there is *ESSENCE Noh* (presented by the Nohgaku Performers’ Association and the Japan Nohgaku Association as a pre-event for the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, addressing 4 themes including physical and multilingual accessibility (July 31st and August 4th); the National Noh Theatre’s *Showcase* (including commentary, subtitles in Japanese, English, Chinese, and Korean, and one number apiece from Noh and Kyogen, from July to August 2019), and Kyoto Kanze Association’s *Interesting Museum of Noh* presentation, *Mansion of Horror: You’ll Never Get Out!* (July 27th). Each of these was aimed at encouraging people to attend the Noh theatre in a laid-back spirit. In the midst of this trend, focusing on a relaxed, easy-to-understand presentation, the most eye-catching offerings were those which achieved that “modernization of the classics,” through the very manner in which they were performed. And each

of these was given by veteran performers more than 70 years old.

A Private Confession

Firstly, there is the *shite* protagonist Kagawa Seiji (b. 1944) of the Kita School. In 2019 he performed 10 leading roles, elsewhere making his mark as *jigashira* chorus leader, playing a key role in upholding the edifice of the Kita School. As of several years ago, the Kagawa Seiji Recital over which he presides has increased its performances to twice yearly, in Spring and Fall, and this year he performed the leads in the 16th performance of *Motomezuka* (April 6th), and the 17th performance of *Higaki* (*Cypress Fence*, September 14th). While each of these were very well received, I would like to focus on *Motomezuka* for the way in which it shed light on a work for contemporary times.

The protagonist in the shocking story of *Motomezuka* is the maiden Unaiotome, who, unable to choose between two suitors, resorts to suicide by drowning, only to descend to hell where she is faced with eternal suffering for her deeds. Many in a modern audience may question why the girl must meet such an appalling fate, whilst a reading of the original text does not seem to yield a satisfactory answer. We might consider this a “barrier of abstrusity.” To perform *Motomezuka* in the present day is to face up to this question.

In sum, Kagawa played a girl who is trembling at her own sin. Set in early spring in the village of Ikuta, girls are picking spring shoots, and then exit the stage leaving the protagonist who leads a

monk to *Motomezuka*, the maiden's grave, and there begins to tell the old legend. This scene, simply titled "A Story," is without *hayashi* instrumentalists or *jiutai* chorus, and features only the protagonist, delivering something close to ordinary dialogue: "once, there lived a girl here named Unaiotome..." yet from his center-stage seat, Kagawa's voice was startlingly quiet. The audience seemed to strain their ears, and the hushed scene dropped into another level of quietness. Then, with an upward stretch, Kagawa continued: "that Mandarin Duck on the Ikutagawa River..." and with this sighting of the bird, a sense of realism emerges, as though the maiden's tale is not some ancient legend, but something occurring here and now. With the death of the Mandarin Duck as a turning point, a text that began as a third-person narrative is transformed into the first person: "it was at that time, that I thought..." The dramatic structure—this switch in perspective from "her" to "I," simultaneous to the switch from past to present tense, is expressed in the intensity of the gaze directed toward the bird, and the precision of the erect, upper-body posture. To put it another way, one could say that it was the acting which instigated events in the present moment.

Kagawa's acting is recognized for its clarity and beauty of form, yet even more effective was the inwardly vanishing quality of his voice. This scene is the maiden's own confession of sin. A confession is not something to be made in a bold, declamatory voice. The voice starts hesitantly, as if checking itself, until eventually reaching a pitch of intensity. I have seen many *Motomezukas*, yet

this is the first in which that devastating movement of the heart leading to watery suicide is expressed with such rawness. Faced with a girl suffering such depth of guilt; the sheer authenticity of this leaves no room for outside perspectives to penetrate the world of the story—including such contemporary questioning, as “what wrong has she done?” With every intention not to harm others, and to do good, still our actions can unexpectedly turn into sin. One was left truly convinced that what happened to that girl could happen to anyone, that this was the Karma of human beings.

Rather than explaining or interpreting the story, the approach of instead delving deeply into the heart of the character and embodying its sentiments; this was seen also in *Higaki*, as well as in *Nonomiya* (*The Wildwood Shrine*, November 6th). Whilst one’s heart was deeply touched by the human attachments and deeds depicted in these performances also featuring Kagawa, it is not to say that he brought any special innovations here, in the acting or the staging. These unique performances were born as the result of a deep reading of the text; re-examining the received wisdom on its interpretation, then utterly embodying its meaning. This is an example of “modernizing the classics” not through adding anything extra, but achieved simply through a natural process of methodical work.

Modified Staging

There is an approach to modernizing the classics which differs from the example above. To illustrate this, let us consider Asami

Masakuni (b. 1941). This year saw Asami give a large number of performances, mostly of the highest order. In contrast to the understated and delicate Kagawa, Asami's performances are lively and florid. In his costumes too, he demonstrates a unique and exacting approach. He resembles Kagawa in his deep reading of a script and his consideration of form, yet beyond this the two men part ways—Asami tends towards readily altering conventions of direction, make-up, costume, and form.

For example, in *Ukifune*, performed at his own recital (November 26th), he boarded an on-stage boat, which is not something that would ordinarily be used. This would be the boat which Nioumiya boarded to accompany Ukifune across the Ujigawa River, in the *Uji Jujo* (*Ten Chapters in Uji*) from the *Tale of Genji*, on which this Noh play is based. In the second half he emerges wearing a scarlet hakama with his hairpiece let down at the sides, cutting the figure of a distracted noblewoman. This is not an arbitrary choice, but necessitated by faithfully following the text. Elsewhere, in the second half of *Kinuta* (*The Fulling Block*, February 6th) after the wife's ghost confronts her husband with the words "Even in your dreams, would you not consider my pain?" a funereal flute is heard; in *Saigyozaakura* (*Saigyo's Cherry Tree*, June 6th), the *shite* protagonist's line "Stay! Stay a while!" is spoken instead by Saigyo, the *waki* counterpart, as a means of rationalizing the text, whilst in *Kazuraki* (*Mount Kazuraki*, December 14th) the *nochi-site* second-half protagonist wears a snow-white garment like that of a snow queen. Each of these are prominent directions

and innovations which provoke a jolt of surprise, lending at times a sensuality to these performances which is unrivalled. As a result, however, there are passages where Asami's intentions and alterations become so prominent as to undermine the overall balance of the whole. To give an example, in a special Candlelight Performance of *Obasute* (*The Old Mother Abandoned*, October 14th) at the Yokohama Noh Theatre, the final scene from the line "Ah! Would I could return to that Autumn of old!" portrays the trembling heart of the abandoned old woman with strong, large-scale acting, which could not help but seem abrupt in contrast to the hushed progress of the drama until that point.

Other Performances in Noh and Kyogen

So far, I have discussed the modernization of Noh through contrasting approaches to the works. Whilst there may be arguments for and against Asami's novel stagings, he and Kagawa are similar insofar as they have released the works from a fixed perspective of a "correct" way of performing and seeing—here is where their route toward modernization is seen.

Elsewhere there have been many fine performances by veteran performers, yet if I were to single out the best among these, it would have to be *Izutsu* (*The Well*, November 3rd) by Tomoeda Akiyo (b. 1940). A particular highlight was the culminating scene in which he peers down the well, then gazes up into the distance as though sending his thoughts across the farthest reaches of time, with the words "how nostalgic...." There was dignity in his straightness of

posture, and the feeling of nostalgic longing, which is the main theme of *Izutsu*, seemed to permeate the stage. To me, this felt like it was the sorrow of eternally losing the most important person in one's life, though others may see it differently. It is rare to find a performance where the life experiences of each individual in the audience can freely overlap and be felt; by the minute subtlety of this acting—blink and you miss it—the audience's imagination is aroused. The actor's voice achieves the illusion of being heard as the main character's very own voice—this quality of realism, I would like to note, is shared with Kagawa.

Umekawa Minoru (b. 1948), who in recent years has become somewhat less steady on his feet, has increasingly been seen using a walking stick on stage—reconciling this with the exigencies of the text. Though it is a shame he was not able to demonstrate the full range of his powers, when taking turns as *jigashira*, he treated us to some musically and dramatically first-rate recitation.

Back on the stage following a period of illness is the *waki* actor Tonoda Kenkichi (b. 1959)—displaying remarkable growth and maturity in his art—he appears like a new man. The former strain in the body has disappeared, instead imbuing scenes with qualities of stillness and softness, as seen in his *sanbanmemono* roles which require the utmost refinement in dance. Further, in *Rashomon* (December 21st), given at the 3rd edition of the Shimogakari Hoshō School's Noh Programme, Tonoda gave a powerful performance as Watanabe no Tsuna, a *waki* counterpart on the level of a protagonist, making a strong impression on his stage comeback.

Under the sponsorship of a *waki* school, this company is an ambitious one, presenting Noh plays in which the *waki* are prominently featured, and thus gauging the diligence with which that art is being studied and transmitted.

In Kyogen, numerous great performances were seen, centring on the unflagging art of 3 individuals above the age of 80, each bearing the status of Living National Treasure. Among their successors, too, we have seen steady growth. Nomura Man (b. 1930) delighted us with the free flow of his refined wit in such works as *Soraude* (*The Brave Coward*, October 14th) and *Kuriyaki* (*Roasting Chesnuts*, October 27th), whilst Nomura Mansaku (b. 1931) broke new ground with an unadorned performance of *Sanbaso*, without mask or costume and in an abbreviated Kagura rendition, on the auspicious occasion of his *beiju*, 88th birthday. Memorable, too, was *Uchizata* (*The Trial Rehearsal*, April 18th), which dramatically illustrated how personality can be transfigured in the space between fiction and reality. Yamamoto Tojiro's (b. 1937) performances of *Futaribakama* (*Two-in-One Hakama*) including at the Hosho Association's Special Spring Programme (March 24th) saw him take the role of the father, with a changing roster of counter-parts. In each case, he showed the capacity and flexibility to adapt to his co-star, and to allow them to shine.

What unites these three great performers is the naturalness and immediacy with which they bring the personage of each role to life. They conceal their art. The selfhood of the performer is hidden, merging into that of the character, giving the impression of

an exact overlap between the two—this could be called the mark of greatness in traditional Noh and Kyogen acting.

In relation to this, Nomura Mansai's (b. 1966) performances at times suggest a quality of detachment from the role; there is a certain criticality. Mansai has been appointed Chief Executive Creative Director charged with overseeing the opening and closing ceremonies at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics—a role in which his directorial talents should be on full display. At the same, one looks to him with keen anticipation, to bring fresh new qualities of acting to Kyogen performances of the future.

Reports

What follows is an outline of significant events in 2019, with brief comments:

• Performances marking a new national era

The Yokohama Noh Theatre hosted a two-part Special-themed performance, *Enthronement—Performing Arts to Celebrate the Coronation*, bringing together works and celebratory pieces relating to the Imperial House of Japan. Part 1 (June 2nd) focused on Ryukyu Buyo (traditional Okinawan dance), followed by Part 2 (July 20th), which featured a performance of *Taiten*, a Noh play which was premiered in 1915 to celebrate the enthronement of the Emperor Taisho, in a revised edition by Nishino Haruo, with Katayama Kuroemon assuming the lead role. The original Taisho edition was also performed, with Yamashina Yaemon as the lead

(May 6th, October 20th). In addition, Kyoto Takigi Noh presented two performances of *Heian*, the 1963 revision of the original Taisho edition of *Taiten* (June 1st, 2nd).

• **Young performers featured**

From March through December, the Cerulean Tower Noh Theatre hosted *Shibuya Noh*, a series commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Tokyu Corporation's Bunkamura performing arts complex. Each of the 7 evenings in the series had its own theme, featuring young *shite* masters in their 30s and 40s, who mingled with audience members in post-performance events.

• **Revival: 33rd Tokyo Edition of the Kongo Norihisa Recital (July 9th)**

Not part of the standard repertoire and exclusive to the Kongo school, *Susuki (Pampas Grass)* was given a revival performance featuring Kongo Norihisa as *shite*, using *Yuki no Ko-omote*, a mask representative of the Kongo School which is said to have been a favorite of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the great feudal lord of the 16th century.

• **Overseas Performances**

- **Japonismes 2018: Souls in Resonance**

This series, which began in July 2018, continued into 2019 with a sequence of Noh and Kyogen performances given over 5 days (February 6th–10th) in Paris, by a troupe led by Asami Masakuni. An authentic stage was constructed, including a covered bridge

passageway, whilst subtitles, pre-performance talks, and workshops for middle and high school students were offered. Asami, Umekawa Minoru, and Nomura Man were awarded the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Government.

- Tessen-kai Noh Theater Association stages European tour of new Noh pieces

From September 17th to October 1st, a troupe led by Shimizu Kanji visited Vienna, Paris, and Warsaw, giving the world premiere performance of *At Jacob's Well*, a work by Diethard Leopold (President of the Austrian-Japanese Society) with dramaturgy and a Japanese script by Oda Sachiko and Shimizu Kanji as *shite*, alongside works including Tada Tomio's new Noh piece *Holy Mother in Nagasaki*.

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Awards

- Imperial Prize and Japan Art Academy Prize, 2018: Kamei Tadao (*otsuzumi* hip-drummer, Kadono School, b. 1941)
- Kyoto Prefectural Culture Award's Distinguished Service Prize 2018: Inoue Hirohisa (*shite*, Kanze School, b. 1955)
- Kyoto Prefectural Cultural Encouragement Award 2018: Shigeyama Sennojo (Kyogen performer, Okura School, b. 1983)
- 40th Matsuo Performing Arts Prize: Nomura Man (Kyogen performer, Izumi School); Hosho Kazufusa (*shite*, Hosho School, b. 1986)
- 49th JXTG Music Award (*Hogaku* Japanese Traditional Music

- category): Kanze Kiyokazu (*shite*, Hosho School, b. 1959)
- Order of Culture 2019: Nomura Man (Kyogen performer, Izumi School, b. 1930)
- 41st Kanze Hisao Memorial Hosei University Noh Theatre Award 2019: Yamamoto Noritoshi (Kyogen performer, Okura School, b. 1942); Kobayashi Kenji (Professor Emeritus, National Institute of Japanese Literature, b. 1953)
- 29th Saika Award 2019: Udaka Michishige (*shite*, Kongo School, b. 1947)
- Commissioner for Cultural Affairs Award 2019: Awaya Tatsuzo (*shite*, Kita School, b. 1928)

Succession of stage name

Teshima Michiharu (Kongo School, b. 1939), becomes Teshima Yazaemon.

In Memoriam

- Izumi Yoshio (*shite*, Kanze School, 93 years old, d. January 13th)
- Asami Masataka (*shite*, Kanze School, 93 years old, d. February 4th)
- Tabikawa Masaharu (President, Nohgaku Pro, Inc., 63 years old, d. March 2nd)
- Tanimura Ichitaro (*shite*, Kanze School, 85 years old, d. June 30th)
- Shigeyama Sensaku (Kyogen performer, Okura School, 74 years old, d. September 21st)

- Domoto Masaki (dramatist, director, 85 years old, d. September 23rd)
- Kizuki Takayuki (*shite*, Kanze School, 80 years old, d. October 23rd)
- Kanze Motonobu (*otsuzumi* drummer, Kanze School, 88 years old, d. November 10th)
- Inoue Kikujiro (Kyogen performer, Izumi School, 77 years old, d. December 5th)
- Yokoyama Haruaki (*kotsuzumi* drummer, Ko School, 84 years old, d. December 26th)

This concludes this brief overview of Noh and Kyogen in 2019. Space did not permit the inclusion of the numerous performances worthy of mention. Further, due to the author being resident in Tokyo, the focus was skewed towards performances in the capital, whilst coverage from the Kansai region was sparse. No doubt, there have been many significant omissions. For this, I ask for forgiveness, and for further details, would humbly refer the reader to the *Nohgaku Times*, a monthly magazine published by Nohgaku Shorin, inc.

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(Translation: Lingua Guild)

Kabuki

Vigorous Performances by Senior and Mature Actors and a Wide Variety of New Plays

Mizuochi Kiyoshi

There were three striking features of the kabuki world in 2019. 1) The senior actors exemplifying kabuki at its best were all healthy and active and presented superb performances. 2) The middle group of mature performers and young actors presented very ambitious productions. 3) There was a wide variety of new plays.

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First, the senior actors of kabuki had major productions that represented the best of kabuki acting in the Heisei era. Sakata Tojuro, who has become 88 years old, is the oldest still active actor in kabuki and he performed the dance *Sakae Kotohogu Fuji no Suehiro* (“*The Crane and the Tortoise*” to Celebrate Tojuro Becoming 88) to commemorate this age (in Japan, the age “88” is referred to as “*beiju*” and is considered to be particularly auspicious). He performed this dance at the Shochiku-za Theater in Osaka in January and at Kabuki-za in Tokyo in April. The second oldest actor is Onoe Kikugoro (78), who appeared at the National Theatre in January in a revival of the play *Himejijo Oto ni Kiku Sono Ishizue* (*Protecting the Foundation of Himeji Castle and its Clan*). Then at

Kabuki-za, in February he appeared in *Kurayami no Ushimatsu* (*The Tragedy of Ushimatsu*), in April he played the role of the young masterless samurai Shirai Gonpachi in *Suzugamori* (*Banzui Chobei and Gonpachi*) and then in May, the role of Tatsugoro in *Megumi no Kenka* (*The Fight of the Firemen and the Sumo Wrestlers*), in October, the role of Sashichi in *Omatsuri Sashichi* and the role of Shinza in *Kamiyui Shinza* (*Shinza, the Barber*), all roles that showed his mastery of portraying the gallant spirit of the commoners of the city of Edo. Matsumoto Hakuo (78) performed two classical roles he has not played in a long time, with his performance for the first time in 47 years in *Ichijo Okura Monogatari* (*The Tale of the Mad Courtier Lord Okura*) at Kabuki-za in January and his performance in *Moritsuna Jinya* (*Moritsuna's Battle Camp*) for the first time in 28 years at the National Theatre in December. But he also performed the lead role and directed *The Man of La Mancha*, in a play which he has made his own as he has performed it for fifty years. At Kabuki-za Nakamura Kichimon (75) performed the role of Mitsuhide in *Ehon Taikoki* (*A Picture Book of the Taiko Hideyoshi*) in January, the role of Kumagai in *Kumagai Jinya* (*Kumagai's Battle Camp*) in February, the role of Chobei in *Suzugamori* in April, the role of Kajiwaru in *Ishikiri Kajiwaru* (*Stonecutting Kajiwaru*) in June, the role of Jubei in *Numazu* and the role of Matsuomaru in *Terakoya* (*The Village School*) in September as part of the commemoration of the hundredth anniversary of the death of his great-grandfather Nakamura Karoku. And at the National Theatre in November, he revived *Koko no Yushi*

Musume Kagekiyo (*Kagekiyo, the Forlorn Hero and His Daughter*). Kataoka Nizaemon (75) performed major roles both in his family's style of Kansai kabuki and classical Edo kabuki roles. At Kabuki-za he performed in *Moritsuna Jinya* (*Moritsuna's Battle Camp*) in March, in *Sanemori Monogatari* (*The Tale of Sanemori*) in April, the role of Chubei in *Fuin Giri* (*Breaking the Seals*) in June, the role of Benkei in *Kanjincho* (*The Subscription List*) in September, the role of Tomomori in *Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura* (*Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees*) at Shochiku-za in July, and the role of Jujibei in *Hikimado* (*The Skylight*) at Misono-za in Nagoya in October. Bando Tamasaburo (69) has been active in both teaching young actors so that they can perform major classical roles for the first time, and he has also created ambitious new productions. He performed the role of Akoya at Minami-za in Kyoto in March and Kabuki-za in December. Akoya is considered to be one of the pinnacles of the art *onnagata* (female role specialist) acting because the actor must combine dramatic acting with extremely difficult musical performances on three instruments. Not only did Tamasaburo present consummate performances himself, he has also taught the role to the young *onnagata* Nakamura Baishi and Nakamura Kotaro. In addition to the classics, Tamasaburo also created new productions at Kabuki-za like *Shinpan Yukinojo Henge* (*The New Revenge of Yukinojo*) in August and an adaptation of the story by the Grimm brothers, *Honcho Shirayukihime Monogatari* (*The Japanese Snow White*) in December.

Among actors in their fifties and sixties, *onnagata* Nakamura

Tokizo and Nakamura Jakuemon showed their skill playing major female roles supporting the top class of male actors. Nakamura Karoku and Nakamura Matagoro also appeared together with the other members of the Nakamura Kichiemon family, displaying their acting skills in supporting male roles. Nakamura Ganjiro and Nakamura Senjaku worked to preserve their distinctive Kansai style of kabuki which is a specialty of their acting family, playing a wide variety of major roles. Nakamura Shikan played many major roles in *jidaimono* history plays with the role of Dosetsu in *Hakkenden (The Eight Dog Warriors)* in April at Misono-za and Tokichi in *Kinkakuji (The Golden Pavilion)* in June at Hakata-za, Tokubei in *Tenjiku Tokubei (Tokubei and the Tale of Exotic Lands)* in October at the National Theatre, and Kiichi in *Kikubatake (The Chrysanthemum Garden)* in November at Kabuki-za. Ichikawa Chusha appeared at Kabuki-za in August in *Shinpan Yukinojo Henge* playing 5 roles, and in December in *Tanuki (The Badger)*. He also played Naosuke in *Yotsuya Kaidan (The Ghosts of Yotsuya)* at Minami-za in September.

The second distinctive feature of 2019 is that actors in their forties and younger were also very active. Kataoka Ainosuke appeared in full-length plays with popular appeal and played Goemon in *Kinmon Gosan no Kiri (The Thief Ishikawa Goemon and the Great Gate)* at Shochiku-za in January, *Koi Tsukami (Wrestling with the Carp)* at Hakata-za in March, Shino in *Hakkenden* at Misono-za in April, and Iemon in *Yotsuya Kaidan*

at Minami-za in September. Matsumoto Koshiro also challenged himself with a wide variety of roles ranging from roles for which his acting family is famous, to major classical roles, to the Kansai *wagoto* style (although he comes from the Edo/Tokyo tradition), new plays and adaptations of stories from other genres to create a new image for the acting name of Koshiro. At Kabuki-za, in January he played Izaemon in one of the most famous plays in the Kansai kabuki style, *Kuruwa Bunsho* (*A Letter from the Pleasure Quarters*) in a production using the Kiyomoto style of music rather than Tokiwazu, which is most often used in Kansai-style productions of this play. In March he played Benten Kozo in *Shiranami Gonin Otoko* (*The Five Thieves*), in June he appeared as the protagonist Kodayu in a new play by Mitani Koki, *Tsuki Akari Mezasu Furusato* (*The Light of the Moon and Longing for Home*), in August he played the villain Nikki Danjo and evil lady-in-waiting Yashio in *Meiboku Sendai Hagi* (*The Troubles in the Date Clan*) and Yajirobei in a newly written version of *Tokaidochu Hizakurige* (*Shank's Mare*), in September he played Chobei in *Banzui Chobei*, Genzo in *Terakoya* and Benkei and Togashi in *Kanjincho*, in November he appeared with his son Ichikawa Somegoro in *Renjishi* (*Father and Son Lion Dance*) and *Togitatsu no Utare* (*The Sword Polisher and the Vendetta*). Then in December at the National Theatre, he appeared in *Komori no Yasu* (*Yasu, the Bat*), a kabuki adaptation of Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights*. At Kabuki-za, Ichikawa Ennosuke appeared for the first time in the role of Bencho in *Odosha* (*Yaoya Oshichi at the Kisshoin Temple*)

in January, in March he played Matahei's wife Otoku in *Keisei Hangan* (*Stuttering Matahei*), in April he appeared in *Kurozuka* (*The Demoness of the Black Mound*), a dance that is a specialty of his acting family, in June he played Shozo and Ekaterina (Catherine the Great) in Mitani Koki's new play, in August's *Hizakurige* he appeared as Kitahachi at the same time as he also directed the play. Then in October and November, at the Shinbashi Enbujo, he directed and starred in Super Kabuki II *Shinpan Oguri* (*New Version of Oguri Hangan*). Onoe Shoroku appeared in many roles with powerful characters. He appeared at Kabuki-za in February in the roles of Gonta in *Sushiya* and Shinsuke in *Meigetsu Hachiman Matsuri* as part of a program in memory of his father, Onoe Tatsunosuke I, in May he played the roles of Kudo in *Soga no Taimen* (*The Soga Brothers Meet Their Enemy*) and Togashi in *Kanjincho*, in October he played Osho Kichisa in *Sannin Kichisa* (*Three Thieves Named Kichisa*), and in December, he played Tonbei in *Yaguchi no Watashi* (*The Yaguchi Crossing*). Onoe Kikunosuke appeared at the National Theatre in January in *Himejijo* as an *onnagata* in the roles of Otatsu and Kojoro and then in April in *Seki no To* (*The Snowbound Barrier*) by contrast, he played a male role with the larger-than-life villain Sekibei. At Kabuki-za, in February he played Yoshitsune in *Kumagai Jinya* and at the *Dangikusai* (Festival Celebrating Danjuro IX and Kikugoro V) in May, presented his son Ushinosuke for his first appearance on stage in *Ehon Ushiwakamaru* (*Ushiwakamaru's Picture Book*) and played the role of Yoshitsune in *Kanjincho* and danced *Musume Dojoji* (*The Girl*

at Dojoji Temple). In December at the Shinbashi Enbujo he both planned the project and played the lead in a staging of Miyazaki Hayao's manga *Kaze no Tani no Nausicaä* (*Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind*). Ichikawa Ebizo is scheduled to take the name of Ichikawa Danjuro XIII Hakuen in 2020, the top name in the Ichikawa family and Edo kabuki. In May at the *Dangikusai* he played Benkei in *Kanjincho*, probably the single most important play for the tradition of his family, but at the same time, he has taken his own individual path. In January at the Shinbashi Enbujo, he played five roles in *Banzui Chobei*, *Kasa Uri* (*The Umbrella Peddler*), *Natorigusa Hanano Juichidai* (*Eleven Generations of Famous Flowers*), *Shunkan* and *Kagami Jishi* (*The Kagami Lion Dance*). Then in July at Kabuki-za, in the evening program, he appeared in *Hoshi Awase Jusandan* (*Thirteen Stars Meeting*) in which he appeared in thirteen roles from *Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura* (*Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees*), switching from one role to another, and in the matinee program, he appeared in *Suo Otoshi* (*Dropping the Coat*) and *Uiro Uri* (*The Medicine Peddler*). He has also produced many performances featuring the actors in his family as well as tours throughout Japan. In January at the Shinbashi Enbujo, Nakamura Shido played Tadanobu in *Torii Mae* (*In Front of the Gate of the Fushimi Inari Shrine*) and in August at Minami-za, he performed in something billed as “*Cho Kabuki* (*Super Kabuki*)” where the latest technology was used to have him appear with a virtual character Hatsune Miku in *Hanakurabe Senbon Zakura* (*A Competition of Flowers: A Thousand Cherry Trees*). In October, he

played the sumo wrestler Nuregami in the *Naniwa Ura* (*The Back Street of Osaka*) and *Hikimado* scenes of *Futatsu Chocho Kuruwa Nikki* (*Two Butterflies in the Pleasure Quarter*).

Among young actors in their thirties, because Nakamura Kankuro was appearing as the lead in NHK's annual historical Taiga Drama, aside from appearing at Konpira Kabuki in April as Gonta in *Sushiya* and in the dance *Takatsuki*, he did not appear on stage. In November after filming ended, he returned to the stage with the temporary theater Heisei Nakamura-za, which was set up on the site of Kokura Castle in Kyushu where he performed in the dance *Omatsuri* (*The Festival*) and the roles of Ryosuke and Hyobu in *Ogasawara Sodo* (*The Disturbances in the Ogasawara Clan*).

Kankuro's younger brother Nakamura Shichinosuke showed his technical and artistic mastery in a great variety of roles. At Kabuki-za, in January he performed the role of the courtesan Yugiri in *Kuruwa Bunsho* and in July he played Masaoka in *Meiboku Sendai Hagi*. In September at Minami-za, in *Yotsuya Kaidan* he played three roles, Oiwa, Kohei and Yomoshichi. In November at the Heisei Nakamura-za he played Ofune in *Yaguchi no Watashi*, Umegawa in *Fuin Giri* and Odai-no-Kata and Okano in *Ogasawara Sodo*. Finally, in December at the Shinbashi Enbujo he performed the role of Kushana in *Kaze no Tani no Nausicaä*. Onoe Matsuya was the head of the troupe at Asakusa Kabuki in January and performed in *Yoshikata Saigo* (*The Death of Yoshikata*) and as Goro in *Soga no Taimen*. Then at Kabuki-za, he appeared in *Gosho no Gorozo* in May, *Kotobuki Shiki Sanbaso* in June and

played a rare *onnagata* role with Ojo Kichisa in *Sannin Kichisa*. Finally, in December, at the Shinbashi Enbujo, he played Yupa in *Kaze no Tani no Nausicaä*. Nakamura Baishi took on major roles with an appearance at the National Theatre in April in *Seki no To* in the roles of Princess Komachi and the courtesan Sumizome actually the spirit of the cherry tree, then at Kabuki-za in October, he played Ojo Kichisa in *Sannin Kichisa*, and then in December he took on the role of Akoya. Bando Minosuke played the title role in the new kabuki play dramatizing the popular manga *Naruto* at Minami-za in June. Nakamura Kazutaro played Koharu in *Kawasho* (*The Kawasho Teahouse*) a key scene from Chikamatsu Monzaemon's *Shinju Ten no Amijima* (*The Love Suicides at Amijima*) and an important part of his family's tradition of Kansai kabuki in January at Shochiku-za, Ofune in *Yaguchi no Watashi* at the National Theatre in June and Princess Yuki in *Kinkakuji* at Minami-za in December. The next younger generation of actors like Onoe Ukon, Nakamura Kotaro, Nakamura Hayato and Nakamura Yonekichi are gaining stage experience and are very promising as well.

The third topic is that there were many new kabuki plays with rich variety. In June at Kabuki-za, there was a play written and staged by playwright and scenario writer Mitani Koki, *Tsuki Akari Mezasu Furusato* based on a section of the manga *Fuunji-tachi* (*Heroes of Turbulent Times*) by Minamoto Taro. It is the story of the ship Shinshomaru that was blown away in a storm in Suruga

Bay in 1782 and the 17 people on it. After 8 months of drifting it reached an island that was considered Russian territory, but starvation and despair meant that already one of the people on the ship had died. The 16 remaining refugees went from place to place in Russia for ten years and in the end, only two managed to return to Japan. Mitani used traditional kabuki techniques, but combined them with his own comic touch. The *Cho Kabuki* presented at Minami-za in August featured the virtual character Hatsune Miku appearing together with kabuki actor Nakamura Shido. The program included two pieces written by Matsuoka Ryo, *Imayo Kabuki Odori (Modern Kabuki Dance)* and *Hanakurabe Senbon Zakura*. The dance featured the woman who is said to have originated kabuki, Izumo no Okuni and her lover Nagoya Sanza with Miku as Okuni and Shido as Sanza. The play was based on the kabuki classic *Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura* and featured Shido as Tadanobu and Miku as two characters that in this version of the story are called Hatsune Miku and Miku-hime. The scene where the two fight with an evil dragon depicted by using cutting-edge visual technology was especially interesting. *Shinpan Yukinojo Henge* presented at Kabuki-za in August was based on the story of a kabuki *onnagata* who wanted to avenge the unjust death of his father, but instead of focusing on this revenge story, the emphasis was on Yukinojo's difficulties as he advanced in the way of kabuki acting. Super Kabuki II *Shinpan Oguri* presented at the Shinbashi Enbujo in October was a reworking of *Oguri*, the retelling of the story of Oguri Hangan with a script by philosopher and historian

Umehara Takeshi and created by Ichikawa Ennosuke III, which premiered in 1991. Using Umehara's script as a starting point, Yokouchi Kensuke wrote a new text and it was staged by the current Ennosuke and Sugihara Kunio. While the original *Oguri* showed Oguri Hangan, the hero of medieval Sekkyo Bushi ballads, as a man forced to wander by his pursuit of ideals, the new version shows Oguri as a man absorbed in love of himself, but after becoming a living corpse by being cursed with leprosy, actually finds joy by discovering his love for the people close to him. This production was distinguished by using projections on stage. *Honcho Shirayukihime Monogatari* presented at Kabuki-za in December was a kabuki version of Grimm's fairy tale *Snow White*. The script was by Takeshiba Jun'ichi and the staging was by classical Japanese dancers Hanayagi Juo and Hanayagi Jusuke. The center of the play were the dialogues between the mother asking who is the most beautiful in the world and the spirit of the mirror. The seven dwarfs were played by child kabuki actors and the entire play was a kabuki fantasy. The production of *Kaze no Tani no Nausicaä* staged at the Shinbashi Enbujo in December was actually based on Miyazaki Hayao's full-length manga rather than the anime, which only showed a small part of the total story. The script was by Niwa Keiko and Tobe Kazuhisa and was in six acts split into two programs matinee and evening and it was directed by the man known as G2. The story is set a thousand years in the future when human beings are driven by unlimited desire and the poison produced by a weapon called the God Warrior burns the earth and turns it into

a wasteland full of toxic gases. The story focuses on the young girl Nausicaä who lives in the Valley of Wind close to the desolation and after many travails, finds the way to purify the world. The story was interesting with many plot twists and a rich variety of characters and the staging used kabuki acting, music and costumes. The story treated important contemporary themes like the nuclear threat and destruction of the environment. In addition, there was the production of *Naruto* in June at Minami-za, which was first presented the previous year, which was a kabuki version of the popular manga. Also, *Komori no Yasu* presented in December at the National Theatre was a revival of a kabuki adaptation of Charlie Chaplin's movie *City Lights* which first was staged in the 1930's with a script by Kimura Kinka.

Mizuochi, Kiyoshi

Born in 1936 in Osaka. Graduated from Waseda University Faculty of Literature, specializing in Theatre. From 1970 he was in charge of the Theatre section for the Arts and Cultural News department of the Mainichi Shinbun and served as vice-chairman for that newspaper as well as having been a member of the Editorial Board and also a special committee member before his retirement. Currently he is Affiliate Member of the Editorial Board. From the year 2000, he was a professor at J. F. Oberlin University, retiring in 2007 as Professor Emeritus. His writings include: *Kamigata Kabuki* (Kyoto-Osaka Style Kabuki), *Bunraku*, *Heisei Kabuki Haiyu-ron* (Essays on Kabuki Actors Today) and others.

(Translation: Mark Oshima)

The Borderline Between Celebratory Rituals and the Change of Generations

Kodama Ryuichi

In *bunraku* puppet theater in 2019, one of the biggest events was the designation of narrator Toyotake Sakitayu as an Intangible Cultural Property or “Living National Treasure” by the Japanese National Cultural Agency. This is, of course, a sign of honor, but is also intended to support artists in the traditional arts so that they can pass on their skills to the next generation.

At present, in *bunraku*, shamisen player Tsuruzawa Seiji, puppeteers Yoshida Minosuke and Yoshida Kazuo are Living National Treasures. Among narrators, Toyotake Shimatayu has been designated a Living National Treasure, but has retired from the stage. That means that Sakitayu will be the only narrator who is a Living National Treasure who is still performing on stage. The Japanese government gives the designation of Living National Treasure, but there is another honor that comes from within the *bunraku* world. Although Sakitayu has just been designated a Living National Treasure, he has long been a *kiriba gatari*, narrator for *kiriba* (final climax of a scene). In fact, at present, he is the only narrator with this designation.

Toyotake Sakitayu was born in 1944 and started studying to be a narrator in 1953. He was a student of the most famous narrator of the 20th century, Toyotake Yamashiro-no-Shojo, and under the influence of his father, Takemoto Tsunatayu VIII, developed a style that aimed at the most orthodox approach. It goes without saying that from a very early age, people expected Sakitayu to become a leader of the *bunraku* world. It was only natural that he would be designated a Living National Treasure someday. But there is an element of chance in being designated Living National Treasure and it can be affected by the number of people that can be designated in specific categories and the preferences of the people who happen to be on the selection committee at the time. Even so, it must be said that for Sakitayu to only become a Living National Treasure at the age of 75 is far too late.

For example, Sakitayu's father Takemoto Tsunatayu VIII, who dominated the postwar *bunraku* world, was at the peak of his powers in his 50s. Takemoto Koshijidayu IV, who was famous for his painstaking and exacting performances, retired at 76 when he felt he was not physically able to perform at the standard he set for himself. At the same time, Takemoto Tsudayu IV, who was famous for the power of his performances, could only maintain that extraordinary power until he reached his 60s.

Considering these artists, one would wish that Sakitayu could have been designated a Living National Treasure much earlier, for example, fifteen years ago. Then, he definitely would have been able to create an "Age of Sakitayu." One reason that this did not happen

was the presence of the late Takemoto Sumitayu who continued to appear on stage until very shortly before his death at the age of 90. This made this period in *bunraku* less an overlong spring and more like an overlong autumn. The fact that the committee, which bestows the designation of Living National Treasure, did not consider the consequences of their action and failed to create the next generation of *bunraku* artists must be judged a terrible lost opportunity. When he was designated a Living National Treasure, Sakitayu said that he wanted to do what little he could to pass on a proper understanding of the art of chanting. Sakitayu's great rival as a narrator was Toyotake Rodayu V, who died while still relatively young, leaving Sakitayu to struggle on alone like a solitary sumo *yokozuna*. One can sense the pain and difficulty of his struggle and hope that with his new status Sakitayu will be able to complete his mission to transmit the proper understanding of *bunraku* chanting.

However, Sakitayu has not been in the best physical condition in the last few years and this has led to very unusual ways of distributing the parts that he performs in the program. For example, in May in Tokyo in the full-length performance of *Imoseyama Onna Teikin* (*Husband and Wife Mountains: a Moral Guide for Women*), Sakitayu performed the *kiriba* section of the *Shibaroku Sumika* (*Shibaroku's House*) scene, but instead of Sakitayu beginning in the usual place, the previous narrator continued for much longer than usual before Sakitayu began narrating, shortening the section that he had to perform and lightening the load. So, the previous

narrator Oritayu performed the *manzai* section of the scene, but his part of the act was longer than usual. Or in October at NHK Hall there was a special joint performance of *bunraku* and *kabuki* of the *Kawatsura Hogen Yakata* (*The Battle Camp of Kawatsura Hogen* scene of the play *Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura* [*Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees*]) with *kabuki* actor Onoe Kikunosuke V. Certainly, the NHK Hall itself is a space much too large for *gidayu* chanting, the music of *bunraku*, but, still, it was very difficult for the audience in the hall to hear Sakitayu. In contrast, when the performance was broadcast, the chanting was picked up properly by the microphones and the recording had the proper audio balance. A collaboration between *kabuki* and *bunraku* is very rare and the last time the *Kawatsura Hogen Yakata* scene was performed in this way was in 1961 when Tsunatayu VIII collaborated with *kabuki* actor Nakamura Kanzaburo XVII. The last time that Sakitayu himself collaborated with *kabuki* was in 1990 when he performed at the Nakamura-za theater in Osaka together with Nakamura Kankuro V (later Kanzaburo XVIII). It is unfortunate that despite the rarity of this kind of collaboration, this performance failed to attract much attention.

Now that Sakitayu has been designated a Living National Treasure, this would be a good opportunity to rethink the system of selecting *kiriba gatari* narrators, since Sakitayu is the only narrator with that designation. From outside the *bunraku* world, it is impossible to know how they are selected or who has the right to make the selection, but as it said in the Asahi Shimbun on May 26,

“The term *kiriba gatari* should be understood in general as recognizing the skills of the top narrator of the time.” So, the standard of top narrator should relate to the narrators of the present time and, no matter how wonderful, it is not relevant to compare the narrators of today to the famous narrators of the past. No matter who you refer to, they have no more significance than university professors have for children. If we place Sakitayu (age 75 / career of 66 years) in a separate category, the most obvious candidates to become *kiriba gatari* narrators would be Toyotake Rodayu (age 72 / career of 52 years) and Takemoto Tsukomadayu (age 70 / career of 50 years) who is taking the name of Takemoto Shikorodayu in 2020. If you take as your standard the narrators who are given the most important sections of plays, that would be Takemoto Chitosedayu (age 60 / career of 41 years) and Toyotake Rosetayu (age 54 / career of 35 years). They will certainly be the center of the *bunraku* world and cannot be ignored. If there is no new designation of *kiriba gatari* narrators, the term itself might disappear. For example, in the past, there was a special status for narrators called *monshita* (i.e. “below the crest of the troupe”). The aforementioned Yamashiro-no-Shojo was the last *monshita*, but after he retired in 1959, no one was considered suitable to be designated *monshita*. So this term and rank itself disappeared. If there is not a more aggressive push to designate new *kiriba gatari* narrators, there is the risk that this position might soon be as dead as *monshita*.

In 2019, there was a full-length production of *Kanadehon Chushingura* (*The Treasury of 47 Loyal Retainers*) to celebrate the

35th anniversary of the opening of the National Bunraku Theatre in 1984, but instead of a full-length performance over one day split over matinee and evening performances, the performance was split into three month's programs with one half of each month's production being given over to one third of *Chushingura*. In April there was the *Great Prologue* to Act IV and the ritual suicide of Enya Hangan, July focused on the love story of the retainer Kanpei and the lady-in-waiting Okaru with Act V through Act VII, and November completed the story going from Act VIII to Act XI with the scenes at Yuranosuke's snow covered villa and the retainers' attack on their enemy. This approach has been used many times in *kabuki*, but is unheard of in *bunraku*. As might be expected, this resulted in many problems and since the relevant sections were spread out over different programs, this made the depiction of some characters seem shallow since the relevant portions were not performed in the same program. However, in a standard full-length performance, there is a limit to how many sections an individual narrator can do in one day. But by dividing the performance into three sections, it was also possible for Sakitayu to perform both Act IV and the *Miuri (Going to the Brothel)* section of Act VI and for Rosetayu to perform the attack in the palace scene from Act III and Kanpei's suicide in Act VI. That this was possible should be counted as one of the major pluses of dividing the play into three.

However, this unorthodox division of the play into three programs also made several more things possible. For example, it was

possible to present scenes that would ordinarily be cut in order to make the length of the program acceptable to modern audiences, as well as to use these scenes as an opportunity for innovation. For instance, the *Rikiya Shisha* (*Rikiya, the Emissary*) section of Act II, which is usually omitted, could be presented. Also, the rarely staged Act X that is usually performed in the adaptation by 20th-century shamisen player Nozawa Matsunosuke, was performed in a revival of an older version, reconstructed by Nozawa Kinshi on the basis of old scores. Another benefit was that with an ordinary full-length performance, the same puppeteers would play the same roles for the entire performance. Ordinarily, Yoshida Tamao would play the key role of Yuranosuke, the leader of the vendetta, for the entire play. But by dividing it into three, there was a rare opportunity for Kiritake Kanjuro to play Yuranosuke in Act VII.

Now of course, one of the distinguishing features of *bunraku* is that it fundamentally emphasizes full-length performances while *kabuki* just stages the most popular scenes. But by dividing *Chushingura* into three parts, there was the rare phenomenon of full houses for *bunraku* in Osaka. Even though *bunraku* usually sells out in Tokyo, in Osaka there are often empty seats. In fact, in November, there was even the issuance of commemorative envelopes to celebrate these full houses. This does not necessarily mean that there should be more full-length performances divided into three, but it does mean that serious thought must be devoted to thinking about why there were such good houses for this

particular program.

Also with regard to full-length programs, in May at the National Theatre in Tokyo there was a full-length performance of *Imoseyama Onna Teikin*. In fact, this was the first production since 1998 to begin with the *Great Prologue* set in the imperial palace. Similarly, in recent years it has become common to divide the play with Acts I and III in the matinee focusing on the *Romeo and Juliet* story of Koganosuke and Hinadori and Acts II and IV focusing on the vanquishing of the villainous Iruka in the evening program. In the mid-1970's, this practice was introduced to make sure that the appearances of the two major narrators of the time, Koshijidayu IV and Tsudayu IV, were balanced between the two programs. But this year, the play was presented with the acts in the original order. It goes without saying that this is the way it should be performed.

The climax of *Imoseyama* is the eponymous third act scene *Imoseyama* where two separate musical ensembles are employed: "Se Mountain," to the audience's right, which presents the world of men with the lead characters of Daihanji and his son Koganosuke, and "Imo Mountain," to the audience's left, which presents the world of women with the characters of Sadaka and her daughter Hinadori. This year the two musical ensembles were led by Chitosedayu (Se Mountain: Daihanji) and Rosetayu (Imo Mountain: Sadaka) who both put their all into powerfully narrating this scene. Compared to the first time when these narrators took these roles in April 2016 at the National Bunraku Theatre, even though they have still not completely made these roles their

own, their performances have strengthened to give a sense of objectivity. The opportunity to face these extremely difficult pieces is an important part of training artists and in the future, rather than lamenting that the performers of today do not have the power of the great artists of yesterday, it will probably become increasingly necessary to give the artists of today opportunities to take on these big pieces. When the younger members of the company performed Acts II and III of *Ichinotani Futaba Gunki* (*A Chronicle of the Battle of Ichinotani*), it was apparent how far away the goal was for these performers, but taking on these masterpieces full on time after time is the only way that they will be able to reach this goal. In the same manner as the newly orthodox full-length production of *Imoseyama* in May with the acts staged in the right order, a full-length production of *Yoshitsune Senbon Zakura* is scheduled in Osaka in April that begins with the *Great Prologue*. This ambitious approach to programming is very praiseworthy.

In December it was announced that Takemoto Tsukomadayu would take the name of Takemoto Shikorodayu with performances beginning in January 2020 in Osaka and continuing with the February performances in Tokyo. This marks the first appearance of the name Shikorodayu in 80 years. The previous Shikorodayu is known from many pre-war SP recordings and his performance style comes from a time when *gidayu* chanting was still popular entertainment in vaudeville halls. Today, *bunraku* is dominated by the serious artistic style of Toyotake Yamashiro-no-Shojo, but when showing that *gidayu* chanting originally contained a wide

variety of styles, most often the previous Shikorodayu is presented as a contrast to Yamashiro-no-Shojo. To revive a name with roots going back to the last days of the Edo period (17th–19th century) provides a concrete sign of the passing down of *bunraku* tradition, and certainly this name taking is something to be celebrated. And as I noted before, Tsukomadayu is one of the most senior chanters active today and it is to be expected that his art is reaching maturity. But at the same time, this name-taking would be even happier if it could be celebrated together with the shamisen player he long performed together with, the late Living National Treasure Tsuruzawa Kanji VII who died in 2018. In any case, it seems a little late for a name-taking to have to wait until someone is in his 70s. Seen in a broader context, this is another sign that efforts to keep the structure of *bunraku* strong and facing the future are lagging behind.

One other thing about name-taking, from the standpoint of the audience, it is difficult to know what issues are involved, but with the Shikorodayu name-taking it is similar to Takemoto Mojihisadayu taking the name of Toyotake Todayu last year. Whatever the reasons, it is disquieting that there are these occasions when performers are taking new names that are unrelated to their teachers. The name Todayu is unrelated to any of the names held by Mojihisadayu's teacher Sumitayu and the name Shikorodayu has nothing to do with Tsukomadayu's teacher, Tsudayu. The “tsu” of “Tsukomadayu” is the first character in his teacher's name. (There is a certain connection to the previous Shikorodayu, in that

the father-in-law of the teacher of the new Shikorodayu, Tsudayu IV, was Tsuruzawa Kanji VI, and Kanji VI was originally paired as a shamisen player with the previous Shikorodayu. Through this connection, when the previous Shikorodayu died, custody of the name was given to the Tsuruzawa Kanji family.)

In addition, Takemoto Chitosedayu and Toyotake Rosetayu are two narrators that will be the pillars of *bunraku* in the future, but they both still use the same names that they have had since nearly the beginning of their careers. The position of an artist helps to determine the quality of his art and receiving a distinguished artistic name helps to pull up an artist. So, we should all recognize that this is for the sake of *bunraku* and consider appropriate artistic names for these performers. Since the September performances, Rosetayu has not been well and has been absent from the stage. He is one of the most important members of the *bunraku* company and we hope that he will recover soon and that he will take good care of himself and his physical condition.

In addition to his activities in regular performances of *bunraku*, Rosetayu has also revived and performed neglected pieces as with *Hime Komatsu Ne no Hi no Asobi* (*The Princess Pine and the Play on the Day of the Rat*) (February 19) and *Hana no Ani Tsubomi no Yatsufusa* (*The Brother of the Flowers and the Eightfold Bud*) (May 29), which is a *gidayu* version of the epic novel *Hakkenden* (*The Eight Dog Warriors*). Both revivals were with shamisen player Nozawa Kinshi and received a lot of attention. Also, Tsuruzawa Enza composed music for a revival of *Shusse*

Kagekiyo (Kagekiyo Victorious) (featuring Miwatayu and Rosetayu and others, May 29). These two projects attracted large audiences and it is to be hoped that the National Theatre will respond to public interest by incorporating such productions into the regular *bunraku* season. Rodayu is second to Sakitayu in rank and participated for the first time in the productions of *bunraku* with new staging by architect and designer Sugimoto Hiroshi and performed in the New York production of *Sonezaki Shinju (The Love Suicides at Sonezaki)*. But more important than that, Rodayu performed the entire act of *Kumagai Jinya (Kumagai's Battle Camp)* in Osaka (August 17) and Tokyo (September 26), work on a scale befitting his status. The first half of his performance was slightly tentative, but the second half was full of power. As expected, the characters of Kumagai and Midaroku were perfectly suited to Rodayu's quality of voice, but what was particularly striking was that the dialogue of Yoshitsune was strong and heroic. To be able to narrate an entire *kiriba* section is the work of a true narrator and we look forward to the achievements of these narrators as they progress on the path of their art.

The puppeteers are headed by three talented and dependable artists: Yoshida Kazuo, Kiritake Kanjuro and Yoshida Tamao. Also, Yoshida Minosuke's performance as Princess Chujo (February, Tokyo) was exquisitely beautiful.

Kodama, Ryuichi

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(Translation: Mark Oshima)

Musicals

Original Musicals Stood Out Looking Back at 2019

Hagio Hitomi

Musical performances have recently increased in number but many of them are revivals of successful productions. These are the safest options in terms of drawing a large audience. On the other hand, many original musicals were presented in 2019 as well and that is a delightful trend. They demonstrate a rich variety of subject matter, creative process and format. It would be going too far to say that the age of original musicals has arrived but the trend could certainly be felt.

***FACTORY GIRLS* -An Inspirational and Highly-Committed Musical**

FACTORY GIRLS—My Story (*FACTORY GIRLS—Watashi ga egaku monogatari*) (planned and produced by Amuse, Inc.) was the most impressive production of the original musicals. The theme is quite striking. The story is set in America in the nineteenth century. It is about women workers in a spinning factory, who try to organize a labour union. The main character Sarah (played by Yuzuki Reon) works under harsh conditions and realises that

women are discriminated against more than the men who do the same work. She makes friends with Harriet (Sonin), the chief editor of a booklet written by female workers. She starts writing articles for the booklet to share her thoughts but becomes aware of a gap between her own ideas and the objective of the booklet. On the one hand, the booklet was non-controversial but on the other hand, it dampened the women's awareness of their rights. Sarah eventually takes action to form a labour union for female workers.

Gender discrimination is still a deep-rooted issue. Women today have to raise their voices, saying #MeToo. The story, although set in the nineteenth century, strongly criticizes the current era. The conflict between Sarah and Harriet represents the long-standing differences in awareness among women. The theme was rather unusual for a musical but perhaps in today's world, it is not so surprising. Although there is room for refinement, it was a brave story and also moving. I hope it will be further polished and revived in the future.

How *FACTORY GIRLS* was produced is also interesting. It is based on the music and lyrics of Creighton Irons and Sean Mahoney, which have never been performed in the US. The producers acquired the production rights and asked Itagaki Kyoichi to write an original script in Japanese and to direct it. While he was working on the script, new numbers were written and added. In other words, an unfinished piece was completed in Japan. This

method of production will probably become more common in the future.

A Wide Variety of Original Musicals

There were other impressive original musicals. One is based on a Korean film titled *One Day* (2017)(directed by Lee Youn-Ki) adapted into a Japanese musical with the title *One Fine Day* (*Itsuka—One Fine Day*) (planned, produced and presented by conSept). Based on the storyline of the film, the director Itagaki Kyoichi wrote the script and lyrics and the music director Kuwabara Mako composed the music.

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It is a fantasy depicting the interaction between the main character who is a widower (Fujioka Masaaki) and a woman in a vegetative state (Minamoto Maho), communicating on the conscious level. The drama is about rebirth and also deals with the issue of euthanasia. Kuwabara's music was appealing and Fujioka drove the story forward with his grounded singing and subtle acting.

The all-female Takarazuka Revue Company's original musical *Che Guevarra* dealt with a subject matter that was unusual for their shows. It is based on the true story of Che Guevarra. Che Guevarra (Todoroki Yu), who used to be a doctor, meets Castro in exile in Mexico and they fight for the Cuban revolution together. The life of the protagonist living for his ideal was dramatically depicted and the piece turned out to be like a typical Takarazuka

show. It was written and directed by Harada Ryo and the music was composed and arranged by Tama Shoichi.

Frida Kahlo—Broken Pillar (Frida Kahlo—oreta shichu)(produced by TipTap) is a biographical musical about the Mexican female painter Frida Kahlo. It is an original musical written by Ueda Ikko and the music was composed by Ozawa Tokifumi. Frida looks back at her life during her last years and the plot develops at a good tempo, using plenty of flash backs.

The Phantom and the Detective (Kaijin to Tantei)(produced by PARCO, KAAT [Kanagawa Arts Theatre], Amuse and WOWOW) is a new musical based on Edogawa Ranpo's novel *Kaijin ni ju menso (The Fiend with Twenty Faces)*. The Phantom (Nakagawa Akihiro) and the great detective Akechi Kogoro (Kato Kazuki) fight over a well-bred young lady (Ohara Sakurako). It was a tour-de-force production directed by Shirai Akira, with Mori Yukinojo writing the script and lyrics and producing the numbers, Sugimoto Yuji composing the music, Shima Ken serving as the music director and Tokyo Ska Paradise Orchestra playing the theme music.

Musical adaptations of Shakespeare's plays were noticeable too. Rock Opera *R & J* (presented by Nelke Planning) is a story about Romeo (Sato Ryuji) and Juliet (Naka Bambi) set in the near future. The production written and directed by Suzuki Katsuhide and composed by Oshima Goro was full of bawdy energy. In

Hamlet (planned and produced by Hakuhinkan Theatre and M.G.H.), starring Yada Yusuke and written and directed by Ogita Koichi, the focus was on the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude (Ayaki Nao). The music (Ia malinconica and Fukui Sayuri) seemed quite challenging.

Another production based on a famous classic was *Oliver Twist* (co-produced by Hyogo Performing Arts Center and Arcs International). As is well known, Dicken's novel became a musical and a very famous film (*Oliver!*). However, this was a new production written and directed by Kishimoto Kouki, with the music composed by Kojima Ryota, who was also the music director. The character Fagin (Fukui Ki-ichi) was played with unusual warmth and it felt fresh.

New Musicals and Masterpieces from Broadway

The major trend in the Japanese musical world is to present Broadway musicals translated into Japanese while they are still fresh but in 2019, there were not so many of these types as in previous years. In the era of multinationalism, cost-efficiency must be calculated and borne in mind. Among new Broadway musicals, *An American in Paris* (produced by Shiki Theater Company) and *Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812* (produced by Toho) were prominent. *An American in Paris* is a stage adaptation of a musical film (1951) using music composed by Gershwin. The original movie is a jazzy love story but in the stage version, the scars of

WW2 and racism are integrated into the story. Christopher Wheel-
don's choreography (he also directed the musical) calls for high-
ly-experienced ballet dancers and it seemed a difficult piece to
present in Japan.

However, Shiki Theater Company boldly took on the chal-
lenge. They auditioned some candidates from outside the company
to find the cast. The production was a replica of the Broadway
version and beautifully presented. However, they seemed to have
difficulty in attracting a large audience to the show, probably
because the musical was not very well-known. Perhaps only Shiki
could have put on the piece because they have plenty of resources.

Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812 is a musical based
on Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. It started off at a restaurant theatre off
Broadway and the drama takes place among the audience. When it
was presented in Japan, the seating area of the theatre was changed
significantly to make this possible. Inoue Yoshio and Ikuta Erika
performed well in the Japanese production.

In my opinion, many productions proved that the standard of
acting in Japanese musical theatre has improved. *Pippin* was one of
them. It seemed adventurous to present the Broadway revival
version of *Pippin* directed by Diane Paulus with a Japanese cast.
The drama depicting the journey and growth of Prince Pippin was
framed by a circus troupe and the cast was required to do acrobatic

performances including trapeze acts. The difficult part of Pippin's grandmother (double cast) was played brilliantly and compellingly by Nakao Mie and Maeda Beverly, who were both over seventy years old. The MC called Leading Player was played by the singer Crystal Kay and it was her first time to perform in a musical. As in her case, the musical actors nowadays come from a wide range of backgrounds.

West Side Story, a landmark musical, is presented as a series at IHI Stage Around Tokyo where the seating area revolves 360 degrees. It started as a touring production in summer, followed by three seasons with a Japanese cast that will run for almost ten months in total. The direction of the tour version and the Japanese-cast version are basically the same. There is no reconciliation between the rival gangs in the last scene. The ending is perhaps a reflection of the present world but I personally felt that something was missing.

There were two productions of another legendary musical *On the Town*. One was presented by Takarazuka and the other was an opera version produced by Sado Yutaka. Leonard Bernstein's music and Jerome Robin's original choreography are appealing but the drama itself seems outdated. Bold changes might be necessary but that is unlikely due to the rights. *On the Twentieth Century*, a 1970s Broadway hit musical, was also put on by Takarazuka. It is a slapstick comedy with Cy Coleman's appealing music and was turned

into a sumptuous production, which was perfect for Takarazuka.

The other legendary musical is *Man of La Mancha* starring the Kabuki actor Hakuo. It was premiered in Japan in 1969 when he was still named Somegoro, revived when he succeeded to the name Koshiro, and again in 2019 after he inherited the present name Hakuo. He set a record of playing the leading role in *Man of La Mancha* 1,300 times,

Other New Musicals and Topics

The Man Who Laughs is based on Victor Hugo's novel. It was premiered in South Korea and the creative team is made up of Americans. The book was written by Robert Johanson, lyrics by Jack Murphy and the music by Frank Wildhorn. There was room for improvement in the script of the musical that premiered in South Korea in 2018 and in Japan in 2019. The Japanese version was directed by Ueda Ikko and I could tell that he had struggled throughout the piece.

The off-Broadway musical *The Story of My Life* (lyrics and music by Niel Bartram, book by Brian Hill) was another musical that came to Japan via South Korea. With two actors, it follows two childhood friends from their childhood up to the present. It came from Korea in the same format and in the same way as *Thrill Me*.

There was also the world premiere of *La Tempesta*. It is a new

piece written by Tom Jones, who wrote the book for the off-Broadway masterpiece *Fantasticks*. As indicated in the title, it is a musical adaptation of *The Tempest*. The longtime friendship between the director Katsuta Yasuhiko and Tom Jones made it possible to present the musical in Japan very quickly.

Back Beat is Ian Softley's stage adaptation of the film with the same title that came out in 1994. It was a play with music rather than a musical. It premiered in Glasgow in 2010, depicting the Beatles when they were living in Hamburg before they became famous. It was translated and directed by Ishimaru Sachiko and put together very well.

There are an increasing number of musicals from countries beside the US and also those that have been discovered. Among them was a French musical titled *Don Juan*. It was premiered by Takarazuka in 2017 and directed by Ikuta Yamato. He also directed the new 2019 production of *Don Juan*, starring Fujigaya Taisuke, who belongs to Johnny and Associates.

Johnny and Associates is now a great source of talent, indispensable for musicals. Johnny Kitagawa, who founded and led the company, passed away in July. He produced many hit musicals and shows, from Shonentai's original musical series *Playzone* in the 1980s to the recent big hit *Endless Shock*.

The genre of 2.5-dimensional musicals has also produced many young musical talents, almost as many as Johnny and Associates, and is still very active. The number of 2.5-dimensional musicals and their audiences are growing. The standard of the performers' acting skills is on the rise as well. In addition, a new theatre called Brilla Hall opened in Tokyo in November and it will be another venue for musicals. The musical market shows no sign of slowing down in the immediate future.

Hagio, Hitomi

Hagio Hitomi is a film and theatre critic. She started her career as a newspaper journalist and has written reviews for Tokyo Shimbun as well as column series and articles for musical magazines. She has written books such as *Musical ni Tsuretette* (i.e. 'Take me to the musicals'), *Les Misérable no Hyakunin* (i.e. 'A Hundred People of Les Misérable') and others. She has also edited and written *Broadway Musical, Tony sho no Subete* (i.e. 'All about Broadway Musicals and the Tony Awards'), *Pro ga eranda hajimeten no musical eiga: Hagio Hitomi best selection 50* (i.e. 'Your first musical film selected by a professional: Top 50 by Hagio Hitomi')

(Translation: Sumida Michiyo)

Contemporary Theatre

Standing as Individuals, Crossing Bridges

Yamaguchi Hiroko

It was a year that saw a series of incidents where public funding for the arts was stripped away.

In September, the Agency for Cultural Affairs decided to withdraw its subsidy grant of around ¥78 million for Aichi Triennale 2019. After the international art festival opened with such exhibits as a video work in which a printed image of Emperor Hirohito is burned, the executive committee office received not only protests but even threats. It was then decided by the organizers to close part of the exhibition venue temporarily. The nominal reason for the grant withdrawal was an issue related to the paperwork submitted by the triennale organizers. Though the grant withdrawal was criticized by many individuals and groups as an infringement upon freedom of speech, the government has yet to explain clearly the process that led up to the decision or who was ultimately responsible for it.

Likewise, the Japan Arts Council withdrew its subsidy for the film *From Miyamoto to You* (*Miyamoto kara kimi e*) because a member of the cast was convicted of a narcotics offense. In September, the organization revised its guidelines allowing grants and

decisions to be withdrawn in cases when something is deemed “inappropriate in terms of the public good.” There are strong concerns, however, over how arbitrarily “public good” will be interpreted. In fiscal 2019, the council provided 172 grants for contemporary theatre that totaled around ¥297 million.

At a contemporary art exhibition organized by an institution in Vienna, a work was exhibited in which the artist impersonated the prime minister, Abe Shinzo, leading the Japanese embassy to retract its endorsement of the exhibition from the program of events officially marking 150 years of bilateral diplomatic ties between Japan and Austria. A Liberal Democratic Party member of the Diet had apparently contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the matter.

Now the longest-serving prime minister in Japanese constitutional government history, Abe is eager to give preferential treatment to “supporters” and “friends” when it comes to how the state is run. Those in power consider what they deem good to be in the public and national interest, wielding power in such a way that may warp freedom of expression. To objections, they give no response or adequate explanation. This political *modus operandi* unprecedented in the postwar era is widening social divisions and fermenting an atmosphere whereby people hesitate to give an opinion that differs from that of those in power. In the midst of this, what can theatre do?

Opposing Totalitarianism

Written, directed by, and starring Noda Hideki, *Q: A Night At The Kabuki* matched the music of the British rock band Queen with a story that imagines what might happen if the two protagonists of *Romeo and Juliet* did not die. Set during the time in Japan when the Genji and Taira clans were at war, Jurie of the Genji and Romio of the Taira appear in both their young and grown-up versions. One of the ways in which Noda's signature entangling and layering of multiple elements emerged here was in the use of names. Echoing Shakespeare's original "doff thy name," Jurie tells Romio to "discard your name." What "name" means here is "family" or "clan." This is a barrier to love; something that divides. But in the second half of the play, the nameless Romio is sent off to fight in a battle and perishes in a cold and desolate land. A name here denotes the dignity of the individual. Once that is lost, we are swallowed up by totalitarianism. In the dark ending of the play, there was anger at how people are forced to die as "unknown soldiers."

We Know Nothing (*Watashitachi wa nanimo shiranai*), written and directed by Nagai Ai, portrayed the women who worked at the magazine *Bluestocking* (*Seito*) in the 1910s. The twentysomething Hiratsuka Raicho, teenaged Ito Noe, and others who strove to think for themselves, to stand on their own feet, were played by actors of corresponding ages as they confronted head-on love, marriage, abortion, and chastity. The struggles they faced in life because they were women, the difficulties of challenging

conventional society as individuals, poignantly brought home how astonishingly little things have changed today, one hundred years later.

Dealing with Kobayashi Takiji, a writer active a little after *Bluestocking*, *Suite Massacre* (*Kumikyoku gyakusatsu*) left a firm and renewed impression. Premiered in 2009, it was the last play by Inoue Hisashi. Director Kuriyama Tamiya's staging remained largely the same for this revival. However, the portrait of Kobayashi, who eventually lost his life at a time when freedom of speech and expression was violently suppressed, resonated with our situation in the Japan of 2019, when the unflinching will of a writer and the determination of those who supported him shone through even more strongly.

Beginning with three thematically linked plays about “the individual and the whole,” Ogawa Eriko's second season as artistic director of the New National Theatre, Tokyo also surely reflected the times. Of the plays, *Guards at the Taj*, written by Rajiv Joseph and directed by Ogawa, was superb. Two young guardsmen serving the Mughal Empire are torn between their duty to obey orders and their freedom of spirit. Their strife converged with the situation in Japan today.

Crossing the Bridge into the World and Encountering Others

When our mind wanders to strange and unknown lands, our world expands. Excellent plays in translation can offer encounters

with people far away.

Directed by Matsumoto Yuko of Bungakuza Atelier Showcase, Tena Štivičić's *Three Winters* depicted the modern history of Croatia through one family. How could people live amidst such social tumult? This was a first-rate play filled with warmth.

In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell and the Cold War came to an end. In Beijing, protests demanding democratization were quashed by the army during the Tiananmen Square Incident. Lucy Kirkwood's *Chimerica* deals with this event, shuttling between New York in 2012 and Beijing in 1989 to weave a thrilling tale of the fates of an American photographer and his friend, a young Chinese man. Kuriyama Tamiya's directing was dynamic and deft. Kuriyama also directed *A Doll's House, Part 2* by Lucas Hnath. Set fifteen years after Ibsen's original play ended, Nora has now returned home, where a war of words unfolds with her husband, daughter, and wet nurse in a drama where each character's emotions, values, and view of humanity is brought into sharp relief.

Seinenza Theater Company's production of *Sweat*, written by Lynn Nottage and directed by Ito Masaru, vividly evinced the process by which grave social divisions appear through a portrait of the people working at a car factory in the American state of Pennsylvania. The audience was left with a lucid sense of the social circumstances that produced the Trump presidency.

Held in Japan for the first time since 1999, the 9th Theatre Olympics took place in August and September. Hosted also at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in Saint Petersburg, Russia, the theme was

“Creating Bridges.” With Suzuki Tadashi as artistic director for the Japanese part, the event brought artists from sixteen countries and regions to Toyama Prefecture in Japan to present thirty works.

In the fall, Tokyo Festival continued with Miyagi Satoshi as general director for the second year running. Though not an especially unified event, given that it bundles together various other events and organizations such as Festival/Tokyo and Toshima City, the choice of overseas productions like *History of Violence* (directed by Thomas Ostermeier) from the Schaubühne Berlin and, from Russia, the Red Torch Theatre’s production of *Three Sisters* (directed by Timofey Kulyabin) performed entirely in sign language, left a strong impression. This year also saw the launch of the World Competition section of the festival, featuring groups from six regions around the world and asking audiences to consider what makes a “superior work of art.”

Written and directed by Okada Toshiki from the novel by Thai writer Uthis Haemamool that took him half a lifetime to complete, and performed in Thai, *Pratthana – A Portrait of Possession* (*Puratana: Hyoui no potoreto*) received its Japanese premiere after its first staging in Bangkok and then performances in Paris in 2018. Intermixing a personal tale of love affairs with the recent history of Thailand and its currency crisis and military coups, this was a densely packed, four-hour epic.

Kanagawa Arts Theatre’s Rich and Vibrant Creativity

Mitani Koki enjoyed his usual success with two plays that he

wrote and directed: *Soldiers of Fortune on a Moonlit Course for Home* (*Tsuki-akari mezasu furusato fu'unjitachi*), a new Kabuki play, and *The Loves and Sorrows of Sherlock Holmes* (*Ai to kanashimi no Sharokku Homuzu*), telling the jauntily funny yet sad story about how the lead character became a master detective.

Matsuo Suzuki started a personal project, Tokyo Adult Theatre Club, writing, directing, and starring in *Life, Too Giga Long* (*Inochi, giga nagasu*). This two-hander about an elderly mother with dementia and her son, an unemployed, middle-aged alcoholic depicted their relationships with a female college student making a documentary film about them as well as the student's instructor. Though reflecting the so-called "8050 problem" of the recently growing numbers of middle-aged shut-ins who live off their elderly parents' pensions, the main focus of the play was the mother and son who eagerly perform for the camera as "problem people" and the way that society views them. It was a play that conveyed a sense of maturity on the part of the writer, affirming while wryly laughing at the folly of humankind that must endure such incredibly long, "giga" lives in what is called the age of longevity.

The up-and-coming Yokoyama Takuya wrote *All People Are Average People* (*Hitowamina, hitonamino*) (directed by Matsumoto Yuko), set in a care home for the physically disabled, sincerely portraying things that are hard to talk about, not least the harsh working environment of the staff and the issue of sexuality and the disabled, though doing so also with humor.

Among theatres, Kanagawa Arts Theatre (KAAT) staged a

packed and successful lineup: Sartre's *No Exit* (*Huis Clos*), directed by the theatre's artistic director, Shirai Akira; Kinoshita-Kabuki's *Sesshu Gappo ga Tsuji (Itoi Version)* (*Itoi-ban sesshu gappo ga tsuji*), adapted and directed by Itoi Yukinosuke; Tada Junnosuke's double staging of *Waiting for Godot* by Beckett; *Dr. Hoffmann's Sanatorium: Kafka's Fourth Novel* (*Dokuta Hofuman no sanatoriumu—Kafuka daiyon no chohen*), written and directed by Keralino Sandrovich; *The Greeks*, an epic staging of ten Greek tragedies directed by Sugihara Kunio; and *Kaison the Priest of Hitachi* (*Hitachi bo Kaison*), written by Akimoto Matsuyo and directed by Nagatsuka Keishi. What this superb series of productions relayed well was both the relationship of trust that exists between the artists, centering on Shirai, and the approach that KAAT employs—namely, attempting to share the inherent fun of theatre that lies in discovering something onstage.

Continuing to Confront the 2011 Earthquake and Fukushima Disaster

Eight years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake. With his company DULL-COLORED POP, Tani Kenichi staged his *Fukushima Trilogy* (*Fukushima sanbusaku*) in full. Following on from the first part, *1961: Sun Rising in the Night* (*1961-nen: Yoru ni noboru taiyo*), which was premiered in 2018 and dealt with the process that led up to the construction of a nuclear power plant, he directed the second part, *1986: The Möbius Loop* (*1986-nen: Mebiusu no wa*), portraying the contradictions and anguishes of

regional government, and the third, *2011: The Words That Want to Be Told* (*2011-nen: Katararetagaru kotobatachi*), which examined people whose lives were destroyed by the nuclear accident. It was a compelling work full of power.

Having relocated to the city of Minamisoma in Fukushima Prefecture, Yu Miri specially revised her play *Still Life* (*Seibutsuga*), first staged in 1990, for a production she directed with local high school students in 2018. Subsequently revived in Tokyo this year, it was a delicate depiction of life and death. *Un bel dì vedremo* (*Aru hareta hi ni*), written by Yu and directed by Maeda Shiro, toured three prefectures in the Tohoku region of Northeast Japan.

Love U (*Rabuyu*), written and directed by Kuwabara Yuko for her company, KAKUTA, told the story of emotionally damaged people who form a kind of family that is destroyed by the 2011 disaster. Though lacking a happy ending, the love that ties people together was nonetheless warmly conveyed to the audience. Written and directed by Akahori Masaaki, *Beautifully, Lushly* (*Utsukushiku aoku*) was set in a town in the aftermath of the disaster. With a rich sense of life, it portrayed the people living in the midst of the threat posed by nature. *World of One* (*Sekai wa hitori*) was a musical written and directed by Iwai Hideto, featuring two men and a woman who grow up while experiencing various setbacks. Though it did not directly reference the 2011 disaster, the anecdotes that cast a shadow across the whole play could be interpreted as a criticism of our current society that avoids thinking about and scrutinizing the nuclear accident that befell Fukushima.

Inheriting and Developing the Work of Predecessors

The year also robustly demonstrated that people are taking on the work of the previous generation of artists. Old plays by Kara Juro continued to be revived. His company, Kara-gumi, went back to his 1985 play *Vinyl Castle* (*Biniru no shiro*) and brushed it up into a striking production, directed by Kuboi Ken and Kara. Its sensitive portrayal of the love between a man and woman who cannot touch directly saw the company enter new territory. *Nina's Cotton* (*Nina no wata*), written by Fujita Takahiro about the life of Ninagawa Yukio and directed by Inoue Sonsho, was performed by Saitama Gold Theater and Saitama Next Theatre, the companies that Ninagawa developed.

In memory of the late Asari Keita, Shiki Theatre Company and Asari Office staged a series of five productions, four of which were musicals. For the first time in twenty-six years, Shiki Theatre Company produced a new work, the family musical *The Cat That Taught the Gull to Fly* (*Kamome ni tobu koto o oshieta neko*). The company has started to reveal a new direction in which creative talent is placed at the fore.

One of the artists who participated in the performing arts section of the Aichi Triennale mentioned at the start of this article, the director Takayama Akita set up the J Art Call Center as part of the efforts to fully reopen the exhibits at the festival, whereby

artists would be on hand to answer complaints by telephone and speak to the callers on an individual basis. In operation for a week, it received around 350 calls. Even though people's views were not in agreement, Takayama said it still led to a significant amount of dialogue. Setting up the stage that was the call center and the theatrical means that was the exchange of actual voices created a circuit of communication.

Theatre could bridge people with differing ideas. We can see a hope in this.

Yamaguchi, Hiroko

Reporter for the *Asahi Shimbun*. Born in 1960, she graduated from the Department of Science at Ochanomizu University. In 1983, she joined the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper. Over the course of her career, she has worked at its Tokyo and west Japan (Fukuoka) branches, and Osaka head office. She is a reviewer and reporter on cultural news, in particular theatre. She has also served on the paper's editorial board and as an editorialist. She co-wrote *Ninagawa Yukio's Work* (Shinchosha).

(Translation: William Andrews)

Towards the Unknown Future

Ota Akira

TYA Inclusive Arts Festival 2019

Those working in the field of theatre for children and young people in Japan were by and large spending the whole year preparing for the 20th ASSITEJ World Congress and International Theatre Festival for Children and Young Audiences. ASSITEJ was founded forty years ago and the world congress to be held in Japan, which has been a long-held dream for the Japan Center of ASSITEJ, will be the largest-ever international performing arts festival for children and young people. In February 2018, the Asia TYA Festival in Japan 2018 was held to create a system for receiving cooperation from other Asian countries by deepening the relationship between Japan and Asia prior to the large-scale congress. With this in mind, in January 2019, Inclusive Arts Festival 2019 was held to prepare for opening a new gateway. Holding these two festivals must have been great experiences that paved the way for the success of the first ASSITEJ World Congress organized in Japan.

TYA Inclusive Arts Festival 2019 was held from January 14 to 20 at the National Olympics Memorial Youth Center and fifteen productions were performed thirty-eight times. The word

“inclusive” means “comprehensive” and “encompassing” and globally it is a word that means “art that everyone can appreciate”. “Everyone” refers to those “treated equally without prejudice regardless of disability, sexuality, or difference in culture or ethnicity”. It was the first time in the field of performing arts for children and young people in Japan that a festival with this kind of theme has been held. “Disabilities and art” was featured at the festival and works of art for children and young people by the disabled or for the disabled from Japan and around the world were shown.

As a side note, at ASSITEJ, the International Inclusive Arts Network (IIAN) is taking an active role in this field. The objective of IIAN is to give every child, regardless of whether they are disabled or not, equal opportunities to experience art. It also aims to share the various therapeutic effects of art and richness of expression. It further aspires to expand its activities to share with people around the world, especially children who are the bearers of the future, that the world is full of diversity through the arts.

In the world today, where priority is given to the economy, we seldom hear the voices of socially vulnerable people. What performing arts can provide to children, what we can do with the disabled, and activities to create a future with diversity, abundance, equality and peace were seen at the festival. The five foreign productions invited to the festival will be introduced in the following paragraphs.

The first was Daryl Beeton's *A Square World* from the UK. The performance of the artists in wheelchairs made the audience feel "the world will change by changing the way you look at things". One day, three good friends, who spent a lot of time together, are suddenly separated into the categories of "able child" and "unable child". They still want to be together and start changing the "square world" they live in by trying various approaches. The original music, the simple set and the non-verbal performances (without using dialogue) stretched the audience's imagination. The production received the highest evaluation among all the works that were presented at the festival. It will be invited to ASSITEJ World Festival in 2020 and will also tour around Japan.

The second was the installation *Frame* by a Scottish group led by Ellie Griffiths. A documentary film depicting autistic children spending time inside a white room that they decorated is screened in a room, itself decorated by Japanese nursery-school toddlers, where the audience sit on chairs they created themselves to watch the piece, experiencing a unique view of the world.

The third piece was *Four Go Wild* in Wellies performed by Indepen-dance, also from Scotland. It was a cute non-verbal contemporary piece, shown inside a tent, performed by a company that includes dancers with Down syndrome. They also held a workshop in which the participants experienced what it was like to exceed their age. They could feel what it was like to go through

physical changes that could happen to anyone regardless of disabilities and the workshop was very well received.

The fourth piece was *Dis_Sylphide* presented by Per.Art & Saša Asentić from Serbia, created by eleven dancers with various kinds of disabilities. Halfway through the show, members of the audience were called on to the stage to improvise a scene, which created a very solemn atmosphere.

The fifth piece was FTH:K's *What Goes Up* from South Africa and sign language was used in the performance. The performers' passion to learn Japanese sign language was gratifying. Seeing a child with hearing impairment watching the show and reacting in the same way as other members of the audience and experiencing how the performers' passion was coming across was extremely encouraging and made us feel their commitment, which in turn helped us to think further about what "inclusiveness" is about.

The Japanese participants also had very unique features. *Ukiyoe: Hokusai* was a piece performed by actors with hearing impairment inside a space like an office, Deaf Puppet Theater Hitomi presented *Hako/Boxes A Music Box of Grandpa (Hako/Box Jichan no orugoru G♫)*, company maxWawacinema presented a non-verbal performance *Small House (chiisana ie)* that everyone could enjoy and Gekidan Africa put on *○△□ Circle, Triangle and Square (○△□ chan)*. Baby theatre pieces were also performed,

which included Grego Musical Puppets' *Hello☆Babies* and *Baby Mini Theater* by Japan Union of Theatrical Companies for Children and Young People.

The two “multisensory theatre” pieces for autistic children and children with severe disabilities that drew most attention were Theatre Planning Network's *Dancing in/with White Books* (*Shiroi hon no naka no butokai*) and Art Workshop Sunpucho's *The Small Sea* (*Chiisana umi*). These children seldom had chances to experience theatre in a relaxed mood up till now and these kinds of pieces have become a worldwide trend, perhaps because the time is ripe and there is a growing social need. At the TYA Inclusive Arts Festival 2019, the creators of theatre for children and young people faced the reality that theatre for disabled children will be inevitable in the future.

Another new idea was attempted at the festival. Sign language interpreters were provided to all the lectures and workshops. This attempt was very well-received by audiences with aural disorders as they could visit the festival whenever they had some free time, without having to worry about making prior reservations, something which is still very rarely possible. Their positive feedback was absolutely delightful and encouraged the organizers to gradually increase these opportunities.

A New Trend

“Inclusive” performances are expected to increase in the world of Japanese theatre for children and young people. In this respect, Theatre Planning Network, which updates its repertoire every year, and Art Workshop Sunpucho based in Sendai are pioneering groups in Japan. For one show, they invite six pairs of audience members. These audience members, however, need helpers and cannot come to the venues on their own. Therefore, “Access Coordinators” give support from the moment they make reservations up until the time they arrive at the theatre on the day of the performance. In addition to spending lots of time and effort on creating the performances, they try to provide the utmost care on the day of the show. I think their attitude is worth following and will spread in the future.

Likewise, “Baby Theatre” is another genre that is recently receiving great attention. In addition to prenatal training, performing arts are beneficial for babies and infants, which is a fact which has been proven by brain science. The need for performing arts for zero to two-year-old toddlers before they acquire language has gained recognition. Baby Theatre started in Europe over twenty years ago and is spreading, led mainly by ASSITEJ. It has also developed in Japan in a unique way and the Japan Union of Theatrical Companies for Children and Young People was recently inaugurated and is actively working on Baby Theatre Projects. During the past three years, they have collaborated with foreign

artists to create new pieces and have produced *Baby Space* with the Serbian director Dalija Acin Thelander, *Kuuki (Air)* created with Polish director Alicja Morawska-Rubczak and designer Barbara Malecka and Baby Mini Theatre comprised of fifteen mini-sized works created with the South Korean director Jackie E. Chang.

Baby Mini Theatre, which delivers simple and convenient shows with a short running time and is easy to tour, using props that can be carried in one bag and can be put on at a reasonable cost, is a gradually growing genre, which also receives support from the government. Similarly to art for the disabled mentioned before, when presenting theatre for babies, attention has to be paid to the arrangement of the performance space and staff to take care of the babies. There is an urgent need to train personnel to run Baby Theatre projects and to develop facilities to present them. The Baby Theatre Project, which has been implemented at seven locations in Tokyo as well as in Kochi, Fukushima and other prefectures, has shows put together with lectures and workshops, in order to create the environment required to accommodate Baby Theatre performances in various regions. It is a miraculous form of performing arts for zero to two-year-old babies that can only be experienced for two years of a child's life and is probably going to become a greater trend in theatre for children and young people.

Works that Drew Attention

Lastly, I would like to introduce some works that were talked

about in 2019. Theatre Urinko's *Watashi to watashi, boku to boku* (i.e. "I and I, me and me") (written and directed by Sekine Shin-ichi) positively dealt with the subject matter of LGBT, which is becoming a new trend, and shared with children the notion of living together, respecting each other's differences. Puppet Theatre Hitomi-za's *Fair, then Partly Piggy (Hare tokidoki buta)* (book and direction by Nishigami Hiroki) is a puppet play based on a popular picture book. Three actors manipulated the puppets multifariously, saying the lines as well, giving children the wonderful experience of using their imagination and having dreams. La Strada Company's *Circus Lights (Circus no hi)* is a nonverbal show drawing on two clown characters and it was chosen as a Child Welfare Cultural Property recommended by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in 2018. The brilliant piece performed with great skill was lyrical and it felt like reading a children's picture book. Kazenoko Theatre Company Kyushu's *Haihai goron* (i.e. crawling, rolling over) was also selected as a Child Welfare Cultural Property recommended by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in 2019. It is a Baby Theatre show in which the audience can relax in a space that feels like being surrounded by music, rhythm and soft fabric. KAAT's *Two Minute Adventure (Nifunkan no boken)* (originally written by Okada Jun and directed by Yamamoto Suguru) was produced as a "KAAT Kid's Programme" and has been turned into an annual series hiring directors who have been active. It was directed by the popular author of children's books Yamamoto Suguru, who used a lot of animation to provide expression in a unique way. *OPPEL*

and the Elephant (Oppel to zo) to commemorate Puppet Theatre PUK's ninetieth anniversary was created by the entire troupe and their performance showed the real strength of the long-established puppet theatre company. Puppet Theater La CLARTE's *The Oil-Hell Murder (Onna goroshi abura no jigoku)* (adapted by Yoshida Kiyoharu and directed by Fujita Asaya) won the Grand Prix in the Theatre Category (in the Kansai region section) of the Agency of Cultural Affairs National Arts Festival 2019. It was acclaimed for reviving the world of Chikamatsu Monzaemon in the modern world and finding unanticipated appeals of the play three-dimensionally, using three sliding stages.

Towards the Unknown Future

From May 14 to 24, 2020, The 20th ASSITEJ World Congress and International Theatre Festival for Children and Young Audiences, the New International Performing Arts Festival for Children and Young People will be held mainly in Toshima ward and Adachi ward. Some one hundred productions, including twenty-five international productions, five Japanese productions and other quasi-invited works will take part. In an aim to realize a society in which “no one is left out”, over a hundred participating countries will share the changes in the environment surrounding children and culture as well as challenges from their respective situations and take a firm step together to “begin a journey” to find solutions and move toward an as-yet-unknown future.

Now everyone must have realized that we cannot create a prosperous society merely through economic activities. From ancient times, we have looked at the inner nature of human beings, depicted the future and have accumulated and inherited culture and wisdom through the arts. When children and culture meet, they create our future.

Ota, Akira

Since he joined Tokyo Engeki Ensemble in 1996, he has produced most of the company's productions. He has held 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. He holds many positions and is currently the Secretary-General of the Japan-Korea Theater Communications Center.

(Translation: Sumida Michiyo)

Japanese Classical Dance

A Time for Innovation in Japanese Classical Dance

Hirano Hidetoshi

One of the new activities of the reorganized Japanese National Agency for Cultural Affairs (*Bunkacho*), the government agency that is in charge of Japan's art and culture, is the *Nihon Haku* (*Japan Cultural Expo*) with the theme of "Japanese people and nature: the continuing 'beauty of Japan' from the Jomon period to the present." This should be closely related to Japanese classical dance since dance is an important element of Japanese traditional culture. With this theme as its motto, the national government, local governments and private groups and enterprises are all working together to advance art forms that embody this "beauty of Japan," aiming at passing this down to the next generation for creation of art in the future.

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1. The Allure of Japanese Classical Dance

Responding to this invitation, the National Theatre sponsored a recital of *Kyomai* (*Dance of Kyoto*) (November 29 and 30) with the purpose of "taking the *Nihon Haku* project as an opportunity to create the contents of cultural resources." Since 1974, the National Theatre has only had performances exclusively devoted to

kyomai four times. This year, it moved the *Mai no Kai: Keihan no Zashikimai* (*Dance Recital: Dances for the Banquet Chambers of the Geisha Districts of Kyoto and Osaka*) from its usual spot in November and held it in August instead, so that it could hold the *kyomai* performance for the first time in 21 years. Under the leadership of Inoue Yachiyo V, the head of the Inoue school of dance, which is the only dance school of *kyomai*, this performance was a fine one that was indeed appropriate to be part of *Nihon Haku*.

I believe that the heart of Japanese Classical Dance depends on three pillars: 1) the traditional culture of the Japanese language that developed in a unique way through *waka* poetry, *monogatari* narratives and *zuihitsu* essays. 2) The traditions of the floats and decorations for religious ritual in *furyu*. 3) The tradition of women performing *otoko mai* (dances by a woman in male costume) exemplified by the performances of the medieval *shirabyoshi* and Izumo no Okuni, the woman who pioneered kabuki dance. Taking a broad view of cultural policy since the time Western culture was introduced to Japan to the present, from prehistoric times, through the Edo period, but also through the modern era to the present, these three pillars have always continued to be the support of cultural creation. When Japanese Classical Dance is a part of *Nihon Haku*, it really should be on the basis of these three pillars.

The Kamigata (the region around Kyoto and Osaka) dance culture represented by *kyomai* developed out of a fusion of traditional Japanese linguistic culture and Japan's view of gender. It is a genre performed exclusively by women supported by being a part

of the culture of the geisha district with a unique training system which flourished into the modern age. Inoue school “*kyomai*” probably developed its allure with the aesthetic leadership of the generations of heads of the school. Inoue Yachiyo I (1767–1855) and Inoue Yachiyo II (1770–1868) were dancing teachers in the geisha district and added expressive techniques from the dances of the classical *noh* theater and the *ningyo joruri* puppet theater. Inoue Yachiyo III (1838–1938), both maintained the innovations of her predecessors and organized it into a dance school and also took the dances from being performed exclusively in the banquet chambers of the geisha districts by staging recital performances in theaters as well.

To take the current performance as an example, the *jiuta* dance *Masazuki* (*The New Year's Moon*) (composed by Tsuruyama Koto) is often performed as a solo dance, but this time there were 4 dancers and 4 singers and shamisen players along with a *sou* koto zither. The Inoue school uses the Yanagawa shamisen, a type of shamisen developed in the early Edo period by Yanagawa Kengyo with a narrow neck and thin wooden body which produces a *kasokeki* (“delicate”) sound. The dancers wore red aprons like the *nakai* attendants at a restaurant with one end of the apron tucked up. This careful attention to little touches in the costumes gave a very sophisticated air to the dance. The lyrics depict the time of taking off the *shime* sacred ropes at the end of the New Year's season, but combine this with the feelings of a woman waiting for a lover. This was combined with the graceful movements of the

female dancers as they expressed these emotions.

Mizukagami (*The Water Mirror*) featured 2 dancers and 4 singers and shamisen players with the addition of the bowed *kokyū* fiddle. This time the performers were in the formal costume of the Gion *geiko* with the Kyoto version of the traditional Shimada hair-style and the *eri* collar lining of the kimono twisted in one place to reveal a touch of red behind the white *eri*. The text exemplified the playful use of language and is based on one of the most traditional themes in Japanese art and literature of the Omi Hakkei (Eight Views of Lake Biwa) which is a list of the iconographic beauty spots around Lake Biwa, which becomes a giant water mirror. This is combined with the feelings of a woman in love. The dance was choreographed by either the first or the second Inoue Yachiyo and the delicate sound of the Yanagawa shamisen evoked the intimate atmosphere of the banquet chamber. The addition of the bowed *kokyū* and the use of fans at the lyrics, “An evening when the winds of Yabase blow on the snow of Hira” made for an exquisite atmosphere.

Finally, although this is not actually a dance, the performance included the *Te-Uchi* (*Hand Clapping*) under the title of *Kuruwa no Nigiwai* (*The Liveliness of the Pleasure District*). This rhythmical ceremony originates in demonstrations during the first *kaomise* performances of kabuki in Kansai when a group of fans would praise a favorite actor. In Inoue school, this is transformed into a rhythmical musical stage performance where the dancers with dancing names play wooden clappers and sing and play the

shamisen. As they enter along the *hanamachi* runway and go to the main stage, the impact is overwhelming. There are several songs that are performed as a part of this and these songs themselves are a precious cultural heritage.

Also, at the National Theatre, as a special performance in May, there was *Kamigami no Zansho–Dento to Sozo no Awai ni Mau* (*Afterglow of the Divine–Dancing Between Tradition and Tradition*, May 25) as a joint production with Arts Council Tokyo. This was the first performance in the *Echoing–Words–Body* series which aims at, “a broad range of encounters with the attractiveness of dance going beyond boundaries between genres.” The program featured Japanese Classical Dance and the *nagauta* piece *Okina-Senzai-Sanbaso* (with Onoe Bokusetsu as the Okina, Hanayagi Juraku as the Senzai, and Wakayagi Kichizo as the Sanbaso), *odissi* Indian Classical Dance, the Turkish *sema* (*Whirling Dance of Mevlana*), and a new work of Contemporary Dance, *Inochi no Umi no Koe ga Kikoeru* (*Hearing the Voice of the Sea of Life*), which was performed to the music of Mahler’s 5th Symphony and a choral reading of the ancient Japanese chronical *Kojiki*. The tickets for this presentation sold out very quickly, so I was not actually able to see it, but considering that the theme of the *Nihon Haku* is “the beauty of Japan,” the positioning of the *Okina-Senzai-Sanbaso*, the fact that Japanese classical dance, which depends on the physical transmission of the expressive techniques embodying the three pillars that I listed above—that Japanese classical dance was treated as being the same as Western dance and the values presented in the Contemporary

Dance means that it was a presentation that went against all the goals of the *Nihon Haku*. I can't help but think that this is something that they must rethink seriously before the next season.

2. The Allure of Individual Japanese Classical Dancers

In recent years, the calendar of Japanese Classical Dance has been overwhelmingly dominated by recitals sponsored by the Japanese Classical Dance Association and the National Theatre. Events sponsored by the Japanese Classical Dance Association include a competition to train young dancers, the *Shinshun Buyo Taikai* (*New Year's Japanese Classical Dance Recital*), a performance where senior dancers perform, including the directors of the Japanese Classical Dance Association, the *Nihon Buyo Kyokai Koen* (*Japanese Classical Dance Association Performance*), and the *Nihon Buyo Mirai-za* (*Japanese Classical Dance Future Theater*) that creates new pieces. In addition, there are various recitals sponsored by the Tokyo and Kansai branches of the Japanese Classical Dance Association as well as the branches in the prefectures throughout Japan. The National Theatre sponsors the *Hanagata Meisaku Buyo Kanshokai* (*Young Dancers Performing Masterpieces of Japanese Classical Dance*), and the *Mai no Kai-Keihan no Zashiki Mai* mentioned above.

In recent years, there have been few striking recitals sponsored by individual dancers, but in 2019, there were three dancers with recitals that participated in the annual arts festival sponsored by the Japanese National Cultural Agency. One is Fujima Kiyotsugu

who performed the new piece *Sari Yuku Koya (The Theater Goes Away)* (October 31, Kioi Hall Small Theater, *Kakeikai: Fujima Kiyotsugu Recital*). The scale of his dance was very impressive. After dancing the *nagauta* piece *Shiki no Yamanba (The Mountain Hag in the Four Seasons)* as a *suodori* in formal kimono without stage set or stage costume, he presented this play. Set in 1945 as Japan is about to lose the war, a *kabuki onnagata* female role specialist chats with the theater's stage manager and they recall the days of glory of that theater. It was accompanied by *gidayu* narrative music (Tsurusawa Sansuzu, composer and shamisen player and chanter Takemoto Koshiko) which was used not as the accompaniment to a dance, but like the *takemoto* in a *kabuki* play, describing the scene and the emotions of the characters, which set off the dancers splendidly. The *onnagata* actor describes the many vicissitudes in his life by comparing it to *Yamanba*. Finally, Kiyotsugu performs the *Yamanba* dance that he learned from his *onnagata* teacher. At this point, the line between Kiyotsugu himself and the role he was playing became indistinct and it was a deep and moving moment.

Bando Fukiko presented *Kitsune Kuzunoha*–“*Shinodazuma Ko*” (*Fox Kuzunoha*–Based on “*A Contemplation of the Fox Bride of the Shinoda Forest*”). (Direction and original work by Fujita Asaya, arrangement, script, choreography and main role by Bando Fukiko, dance supervision by Bando Kozue. November 6, Small Hall of the National Theatre.) This was based on the one-man show *Shinodazuma Ko* by the theatrical artist Nakanishi Kazuhisa, which was a play based on Fujita Asaya's literary historical essay,

Setsuwa ni Miru Iruikon–“*Shinodazuma*” *Ko no Shiten* (*Marriages Between Animals and Humans as Seen in Setsuwa Stories—from the Point of View of the “Fox Wife of the Shinoda Forest”*) included in ‘Kabuki Monthly’ July 1976, which Fujita himself reworked into a play, 13 years after the appearance of the essay. In this performance, Bando Fukiko transformed this story into a piece told by a solo dancer. The creation of a new theatrical work with a story told through dance was very interesting, but the dance itself did not always match the music and unfortunately, there was not always a through line through the piece. But I also strongly felt her desire to grapple with new pieces like this and she will be a Japanese Classical Dancer to watch in the future.

One more dancer to introduce is Fujima Makinosuke with the *shinnai* piece *Kotobuki Neko* (*The Auspicious Cat*), lyrics by Kazu Hajime, composed by Shinnai Tagatayu, flute and percussion composed by Tosha Roei, choreographed and danced by Fujima Makinosuke, October 19 Nihonbashi Kokaido (Nihonbashi Gekijo) at the *Gin'enkai* recital. This is a piece that was composed in 2005 by Shinnai Takeshi (now Tagatayu) at the age of 18 under the title *shinnai joruri: Maneki Neko* (*Good Fortune Cat*). When it was performed as a dance the following year choreographed by Fuji Michie, its title was changed to *Kotobuki Neko*. Makinosuke first performed it in 2006. I felt Makinosuke's talent in reshaping the story into the format of a *rakugo* comic storyteller telling the story and the choreography of the dance. The dance was very witty and celebrated cats as a sign of good fortune as a kind of advertising spiel and list of

various kinds of cats. The only thing that was unfortunate is that it was danced to recorded music rather than a live performance.

In 2019, other dancers that were notable included Nishikawa Minosuke, Wakayagi Kichizo, Wakayagi Soju, the father and son Saruwaka Kiyokata and Seizaburo, and Hanayagi Juraku. They also have had solo recitals, but often these recitals are produced with the support of their schools of dance. If the aim is to invigorate the world of Japanese Classical Dance, the best way might be for the schools of dance to support the creative activities of performers like the three mentioned above.

3. Other Topics, The Renovation of Japanese Classical Dance

As head of the Ichikawa school of dance, media favorite Ichikawa Ebizo had a recital commemorating the name-taking of people in his family heading the school and did it as a commercial theatrical event. At the Ichikawa Kai (August 3–12, Bunkamura Theater Cocoon) there was name-taking of three people, Ebizo's aunt Ichikawa Kobai became Ichikawa Juko I, his sister Ichikawa Botan became Ichikawa Suisen IV and his daughter Horikoshi Reika became Ichikawa Botan IV. The program began with *Kotobuki Shiki Sanbaso* with Ichikawa Ebizo as head of the Ichikawa school of dance as Okina, Juko as Senzai and Suisen as Sanbaso. Then the *noh* actors Katayama Kuroemon, Umewaka Kisho and Kanze Yoshimasa alternated in appearing and presented a portion of a *noh* play. Then Ebizo's children appeared with his

son Horikoshi Kangen in *Tama Usagi* (*The Rabbit in the Moon*) and his daughter, the new Botan in *Hane no Kamuro* (*The Kamuro Courtesan Apprentice at New Year's*). Finally, Suisen appeared in *Musume Dojoji* (*The Girl at Dojoji Temple*). In *kabuki*, there are usually large numbers of priests, but in this production, there were just two, played by prominent members of other schools of Japanese Classical Dance, Nishikawa Minosuke and Hanayagi Juraku in the first half of the run and Fujima Kanjuro and Onoe Kikunojo in the second half of the run. It was a great success and the tickets sold out immediately. This was a joint production of the Ichikawa school of dance and the theater where it was presented, Tokyu Bunkamura. It was very unusual to present a dance recital as a commercial production since usually with dance events like name-takings and memorial performances, the theater just rents out the space and a recital is almost exclusively for other dancers in the school and friends and family of the dancers.

In 2019, one striking event in the dance world were two dance recitals that were billed as *Memorial Recital Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Death of the 2nd Head of the Hanayagi School, Hanayagi Jusuke II and the 13th Anniversary of the Death of the 3rd Head of the Hanayagi School, Hanayagi Jusuke III*. One was sponsored by the Hanayagi School of Dance K.K. (July 29, 30, Kabuki-za). The other was held the previous year (November 26, 2018, Kabuki-za) after Hanayagi Takahiko became independent of the Hanayagi School and established his own school of dance, the Toshiyagi School, in May and he became the head of the school

under the name Toshiyagi Takahiko. The sponsor of the first recital, Hanayagi Jusuke V, wrote in the program that in the 4 years since becoming head of the school, “I realized what extraordinary efforts must have been involved in establishing the school and made me have renewed gratitude for their efforts.” In other words, he made the key purpose of a school of dance the preservation of the tradition of the past. Schools of dance are a necessary evil to preserve the art of the past. Seeing that after over ten years of struggle over who would succeed as head of the Hanayagi School, Hanayagi Takahiko had to establish his own school Toshiyagi, the fact that Takahiko was still so attached to the tradition of the Hanayagi School made me feel even more strongly that the organized dance schools are meaningless with regard to new creation.

At the 76th session of the largest national dance competition in Japan the All Japan Dance Concours (sponsored by Tokyo Shinbun, March 24 – April 5, Meguro Persimmon Hall), in the traditional section of Division 1 (aged over 16), *ryukyu buyo* (Traditional Okinawan Dance) took first and second place. *Ryukyu buyo* had participated before, but this was the first time ever that they received a prize. This made me think that we must rethink the official definition of what can be considered to be “Japanese Classical Dance.” *ryukyu buyo* is one important form of traditional dance in Japan and since 2017, the Japanese government has recognized it as an important Intangible Cultural Heritage along with *kabuki buyo*, *kyomai* and *kamigata mai*. However, probably, the Japanese Classical Dance Association has never

considered *ryukyu buyo* to be a form of Japanese dance. I strongly believe that since the Japanese Classical Dance Association prides itself to govern all that is Japanese Classical Dance as a form of Japanese traditional culture, for the purpose of the further development of Japanese Classical Dance, it is necessary to reconsider the possibility of admitting people involved with *ryukyu buyo*.

The dance boom in Japan is extraordinary. For a long time, Japanese Classical Dance has been fixed in its attention to the present. I would like the people associated with Japanese Classical Dance to treat the works of the past as a resource to be used, not the be all and end all. Then I would like them to be a part of the Japanese dance boom.

Finally, the 2018 Art Encouragement Prize awarded by the National Cultural Agency went to *kyomai*'s Inoue Yasuko and the 2019 Prize for Excellence went to Fujima Kiyotsugu.

Hirano, Hidetoshi

Nihon buyo (Japanese classical dance) critic. Born in 1944 in Sendai and graduated from the theater 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*. Then as a critic, his interest has been in investigating the art of physical expression. He is a member of advisory committees for 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

Staying Afloat in the Midst of Turmoil

Urawa Makoto

The Influence of Society on Ballet in Japan

2019 was a rough year for Japan on several fronts. The rift with the Korean government widened and there were many domestic political scandals. The tax hike and the ongoing trade friction between US and China have worsened the situation for businesses and have had an impact on household budgets. As climate change continued to wreak havoc in many parts of the world, Japan suffered another heat wave in the summer and Tokyo metropolitan area and the eastern part of the country were hit by a succession of mega-typhoons.

While the nation has been preparing for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics and Japanese athletes have demonstrated their prowess in rugby, tennis and other sports, dance companies are cutting back on their budgets and keeping a low profile. During the year, many performances had to be cancelled due to the series of mega-typhoons and the unavoidable suspension of transport services. These extraordinary events have made the dance industry realise that the social problems could no longer be ignored.

The drop in the young population due to a low birth rate (lesson fees and performance tickets are important sources of income for ballet companies in Japan) is gradually widening the gap between the best and worst performing companies and regions, in the already threatened dance industry. Regional disparity is a huge issue in Japan. While some areas have seen wider audiences, such as the major cities of the metropolitan region, together with the three main cities in Western Japan (Kobe, Osaka, and Kyoto), as well as Nagoya and its surrounding cities, the other regions have suffered greatly in terms of population, economy and infrastructure in spite of strenuous efforts to revitalize them. As a result, the dance companies in these regions are experiencing significant difficulties.

In general, the dance companies in Japan, and especially the ballet companies, are concentrated in the major cities. In the regions, even in cities where the population exceeds a million, there are almost no professional dance troupes. Some companies in the regions invite renowned male dancers or choreographers to take part in their performances. Some of this year's performances were outstandingly good, but most of them were simply not good enough. Even in the metropolitan area, some medium-sized dance companies cancelled performances or scaled them down to show-cases. I would like to pick out some of the most noteworthy and impressive performances.

The Metropolitan Companies' Fight for Survival

Firstly, I would like to talk about ballet companies in Tokyo, where fifteen troupes present their own versions of *The Nutcracker* at the end of every year, something very rare in the rest of the world. The National Ballet of Japan, Matsuyama Ballet, Asami Maki Ballet Tokyo, The Tokyo Ballet, and K-Ballet Company presented both new and classical productions throughout the year. On the other hand, Noriko Kobayashi Ballet Theatre, Tokyo City Ballet, Star Dancers Ballet, and NBA Ballet Company actively followed their own paths. Inoue Ballet Company invited the young and aspiring Ishii Ryuichi to choreograph their new piece *Silvia*. Tani Momoko Ballet Company presented a revised version of *La Bayadère*, directed by their new artistic director Takabe Hisako, which met with great acclaim. In addition to their usual theatre program, Ballet Chambre Ouest hosted Kiyosato Field Ballet, an outdoor performance, in Yamanashi prefecture during the summer. This 2019 production, their thirtieth, attracted large audiences from all over the country. Japan Ballet Association, the national organization for ballet, put together a cast of first-rate ballet dancers in a fully-fledged production featuring talented choreographers, both Japanese and foreign. And this year Shinohara Seiichi's choreography of *Swan Lake* showed flashes of highly original inspiration.

Despite the difficult conditions, many companies took on new productions. K-Ballet Company, led by Kumakawa Tetsuya,

presented *Carmina Burana* with the maestro Andrea Battistoni, followed by *Madame Butterfly*, their first Japanese-themed production. These two newly-choreographed productions, which ran from September to October, attracted a lot of attention. Tokyo Ballet Company took on *Le Corsaire* for the first time this year. They also hired the world-renowned contemporary dancer and choreographer Teshigawara Saburo for their piece *Remains of a Cloud (Kumo no nagori)*. Their revised version of *The Nutcracker*, choreographed and directed by their artistic director Saito Yukari, had a clear concept and was a huge advance for the company.

The major ballet companies worked very hard to attract new audiences, get more funding, and increase the number of productions. In spring and summer, Tokyo Ballet Company held various public events outside their regular performance schedule, which were well attended by many families in the region. Tokyo City Ballet also held promotional events in Koto ward where they are based. Many companies have reshaped their fan bases to raise more money. For example, Asami Maki Ballet Tokyo invites celebrity guests to its fan events.

More and more companies are performing outside of Tokyo. The National Ballet of Japan, Matsuyama Ballet, K-Ballet Company and other companies performed nationwide, and more companies traveled abroad this year. Asami Maki Ballet Tokyo performed *Asuka* in Vladivostok, Russia, in January and interacted with the

local people. In June and July, Tokyo Ballet Company went on their annual European tour with the piece *The Kabuki*. In July, Star Dancers Ballet attended the Japan Expo in Paris. Commissioned by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, the company presented *Dragon Quest*, a piece that transformed role-playing games into ballet. Also in July, a small company called Okamoto Rumiko Ballet Studio traveled to Vladivostok and performed *Requiem*, a piece based on a mass murder case that occurred at Tsukui Yamayuri-en, a care home for people with disabilities. In August, Matsuyama Ballet performed at a pre-event celebrating the Seventieth Anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. The piece was called *The White-haired Girl (Hakumajo)*, which they had already presented in China a number of times in the past.

Every year, many young talents graduate from ballet schools attached to the ballet companies. More companies are setting up satellite companies, called “junior companies”, to give young performers the opportunity to perform onstage. Such companies include Asami Maki Ballet Tokyo, which has used this system for a long time, K-Ballet Company, Tani Momoko Ballet Studio Company, which is collaborating with art universities, Tokyo City Ballet and Star Dancers Ballet.

And next, let me discuss the dancers. Yoshida Miyako is to take up the post of artistic director at The National Ballet of Japan starting from Season 2020/2021. She retired from dancing after her

performance *Last Dance*, hosted by NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) in August 2019. She starred in Frederick Ashton's *Birthday Offering* (*Tanjobi No Okurimono*) together with members of The National Ballet of Japan and other top dancers based in and outside Japan, and she also danced with her former co-member Irek Mukhamedov at The Royal Ballet in Peter Wright's *The Mirror Walkers*. The performance was documented and broadcast on NHK and viewers were moved by her integrity. Morishita Yoko, who joined Matsuyama Ballet long before Yoshida, danced three major Tchaikovsky ballet pieces including *Sleeping Beauty*, as well as *Giselle*, last year. She also starred in a new piece choreographed by Shimizu Tetsutaro. When you consider the amount of work that went into this program, it is hard to believe that she is over seventy years old. The National Ballet of Japan did not go outside their usual repertoire this year, but their range of dancers is extending year by year.

Dire Situation in the Regions Despite Valiant Efforts

Although some progress was made by companies based in Tokyo, in regions such as Kansai (Western Japan) and the Nagoya area, not many original works were staged, compared to previous years. Homura Tomoi Ballet Company based in Osaka and boasting a long tradition, maintained its usual output, while Jinushi Ballet Company's *Little Mermaid*, scaled up from the version premiered three years ago, was a significant achievement. Noma Ballet Company has been presenting classical ballets newly interpreted by

Noma Kei. This year's *Giselle*, also choreographed by her, was an intelligent and highly innovative piece. Soda Ballet, led by Soda Shizuko, invited Ijima Nozomi, a principal dancer at Houston Ballet, to perform the lead role in *Giselle*. Nakano Mitsuko collaborated with her son Nakano Yoshiaki, a principal dancer at Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, to present both classical and contemporary pieces. In Kyoto, Ryuko Arima Memorial Kyoto Ballet hosted *Giselle* featuring Karl Paquette, an étoile of Paris Opera Ballet; his farewell performance. By coincidence, two companies presented *Giselle* in the same year. In Kobe, Sadamatsu Hamada Ballet has been very active, putting on classical and contemporary productions including a revival of *Romeo and Juliet*, choreographed by Sadamatsu Shoichiro. Hatano Sumiko Ballet Studio presented a sequence of pieces choreographed by Fukagawa Hideo. However, my impression is that regional companies in general staged less productions with fewer performances. I hope that this trend is only temporary.

In Nagoya, by contrast, where a major theatre refurbishment took place, there was a slight improvement compared to the year before. Matsuoka Reiko Ballet Company maintained their high standard, and the long-established Ochi International Ballet rallied strongly with Ochi Kumiko's *Romeo and Juliet*. Yoko Tsukamoto Theatre de Ballet Company trusted to Fukagawa Hideo's choreography. Setsuko Kawaguchi Ballet presented a powerful *Giselle*. Sumina Okada Ballet, which mainly deals with classics and presented *The Nutcracker* this year, is making a steady progress.

Other notable performances were few, but we should mention *La Sylphide* by Morita Yuki Ballet from Hamamatsu city, and a piece by Midorima Ryoki from Okinawa who performed in Tokyo for the first time in two years.

Japan Targeted by Foreign Companies

As usual, many foreign companies came to Japan this year. We had Eifman Ballet for the first time in twenty-one years, and Netherland Dans Theatre (NDT) for the first time in thirteen years. NDT seemed to have gained a new identity since Jiri Kylian's era. The National Ballet of China came to Japan for the first time and attracted a lot of attention. Mega-companies like The Royal Ballet, as well as smaller troupes also came to Japan featuring renowned dancers such as Manuel Legris and Alessandra Ferri. Productions featuring dancers from internationally-known ballet companies such as Paris Opera Ballet stood out. Independent productions featuring foreign-based Japanese dancers are being put on in cities like Tokyo, Yokohama and Osaka. Foreign choreographers are giving a number of workshops and classes in Japan, and more and more ballet companies abroad are looking for Japanese students interested in attending their short-term programs and summer schools. Japan is becoming a target for the foreign ballet companies.

The number of ballet competitions has continued to rise and it is now over a hundred. Many have been cancelled, suspended and

shortened, but new ones are still being organized and Japanese dancers are taking part in competitions abroad. These competitions can be a pathway to foreign ballet schools and for this reason they are popular with young dancers interested in working with companies abroad. Although foreign companies are having a hard time just like their counterparts in Japan, more and more of them are seeking marketing opportunities here.

Taking all this into consideration, it would be fair to conclude that Japan is still a “ballet nation” in spite of negative factors such as the low birth rate and the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

However, we cannot ignore the impact of the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics. Many ballet companies are already having difficulties preparing for next summer, which will be a crucial period for all of them.

Urawa, Makoto

His real name is Ichikawa Akira. He is a former professor of Culture Studies at Shoin University. He has written articles for newspapers and magazines as advisor and dance critic to The Association of Public Theaters and Halls in Japan. He has been a member of various committees such as the Agency of Cultural Affairs. He has also been on the judging panel of many dance competitions.

(Translation: Ishikawa Mai, Donncha Crowley)

Contemporary Dance and Butoh

The Lack of Dance Literacy in Japan

Tsutsumi Hiroshi

People in Japan have never been so keenly alert to their cultural environment as in 2019.

At the arts festival Aichi Triennale, the exhibition *After 'Freedom of Expression?' (Hyogen no Fujiyuten—Sonogo)* was cancelled temporarily due to defamatory attacks online, as well as a flood of complaints and threats by phone. Government comments on the issue amounting to an act of censorship led to the Agency for Cultural Affairs withdrawing an already-promised grant. Subsequently, Vienna Art Exhibition, Kawasaki Shinyuri Film Festival, and the Japan Arts Council, which canceled the grant to the film *Miyamoto (Miyamoto kara Kimie)*, also voluntarily gave ground in view of the political atmosphere and a few complaints from the public.

These problems shared the same cause: lack of cultural literacy. Principles of law were ignored, and the discretion of organizations was disregarded. People didn't look at the context or at the background of the work; they simply condemned it and even called it toxic. As a result, it was not just the freedom of expression of the artist, but also the freedom of the audience to see art, that was

affected. And some demonstrators actually took to the streets to protest against “killing culture”.

Luckily nothing like this happened in the dance field, but it could happen at any time. Our society in general lacks cultural literacy, and dance is no exception. People are not necessarily familiar with this particular art form and its context can be easily misunderstood.

Pioneers of Butoh Still a Force

Here is a good example. The founder of butoh dancing, Hijikata Tatsumi (1928-1986) practiced a style called “ankoku butoh” (which literally means “dance of darkness”) that focused on the dark side of the human body. He used indigenous Japanese body gestures and the rural landscapes of the Tohoku region as motifs. However, nowadays butoh is often linked in people’s minds to naked bodies, white body paint, the obscene, the grotesque and the gruesome; which is not everyone’s cup of tea. Sixty years have passed since the birth of this style. At one time, people worried that butoh might not survive, but first generation butoh dancer Kasai Akira, and the second generation Maro Akaji and Amagatsu Ushio have created new pieces and their creative appetite shows no signs of flagging.

Kasai Akira adapted Shibusawa Tatsuhiko’s novel *The Voyage of Takaoka Imperial Prince* (*Takaoka Shinno kokaiki*) into a dance piece. In the *Afterglow of the Devine—Dancing between tradition*

and creation (*Kamigami no zansho—dento to sozo no awai ni mau—*) hosted by the National Theatre, he presented the world premiere of *Hearing the Voice of the Sea of Life* (*Inochi no umino koe ga kikoeru*), a dance piece in which the performers read the *Records of Ancient Matters* (*Kojiki*) as a group. This was a spectacular piece combining ballet, butoh and eurythmy.

Maro Akaji, who received the Taneda Santoka Award in 2018, premiered *Notare*● (the meaning of ● is left for the audience to interpret) with his own group Dairakudakan, honoring the life of a wandering free-verse Haiku poet, Taneda Santoka, who was not afraid of dying like a dog.

Amagatsu Ushio, the leader of the group Sankaijuku, presented their first new piece in four years called *Arc* (*Arc hakumei hakubo*). However, he himself was ill, so this was Sankaijuku's first piece without Amagatsu, giving young butoh dancers a great opportunity to develop their craft. The two "arcs", which can be seen as symbols of the sun and the moon, slowly traverse the backdrop throughout the piece. The dancers respond to the movement of the heavenly bodies, enacting a scene of cosmic providence on stage. This piece represented the culmination of all their work up to now.

Three Characteristics of Japanese Contemporary Dance

Japanese contemporary dance, which arose in the 1990s, differs from butoh dance in terms of background and contexts and

has three main characteristics.

1. Artists are independent, and do not defer to authorities or organizations.
2. Artists have their own dance language and choreography methods.
3. Artists use forms of expression that are accessible to people both inside and outside Japan.

Prior to that, the teacher-pupil relationship was still deeply rooted in the vertically structured Japanese dance industry. Japan Ballet Association and Contemporary Dance Association of Japan were national organizations and winning at competitions hosted by them was crucial to acquiring status as a dancer. But the structure of these organizations was deeply hierarchical, so their teacher-pupil relationships sometimes influenced the results of competitions.

From the 1980s to the 1990s, artists began distancing themselves from these authorities and organizations to put on independent productions for a wider and more general audience. They also toured abroad and held workshops open to everybody.

Teshigawara Saburo: A Watershed Moment

Teshigawara Saburo, who was awarded the Bagnolet International Choreography Award in 1986, has all three of the aforementioned characteristics. He was a pioneer in the Japanese contemporary dance world. He uses relaxation and breathing techniques

to release tension from the body and to feel the surrounding environment with his skin, so that eventually the texture of the atmosphere affects his improvisational movements. He taught this method, which he developed himself at workshops, and greatly influenced the younger generation. Teshigawara changed the whole dynamic of the dance scene and started a new era.

In 2019, Teshigawara presented a revival of *Cinnamon*, and premiered *Forgetful Angel (Vergesslicher Engel)*—the *Hand of Paul Klee (Wasureppoi tenshi Paul Klee no te)* at Theater X (Cai). In his Update Dance series, he presented ten pieces, including *body print blue chronicle*, a hypothetical, introspective “body record” of the blind dancer Stuart Jackson, with whom he collaborated in *Luminous*, and also Sato Rihoko’s first solo piece *IZUMI* (i.e. Fountain) choreographed by Sato herself. The Tokyo Ballet, which celebrated its fifty-fifth anniversary this year, commissioned him to choreograph a new piece, *Remains of a Cloud (Kumo no nagori)*. It is based on Fujiwarano Sadaie’s traditional thirty-one syllable poem; “It is hard to know which cloud, but a cloud must have blown the smoke of my friend. The smell of a citrus flower lingers in the sunset”. The poem laments the death of his close friend, evoked by the scent of the citrus flower; it could be said that this piece is also a sort of “body record”.

Artists that Emerged in the 1990s

After Teshigawara, a succession of young artists appeared throughout the 1990s one after another. Many of them learned

ballet as children but dropped out of the ballet world without being recognized, or began dancing at the end of their teens, which is generally considered too late. These artists didn't embrace the orthodoxy of the time and did not rely on traditional methods and vocabularies. They came up with their own original movements, combining release and floor techniques, and contact improvisations, which were all still new in Japan at that time.

Kitamura Akiko introduced the idea of a “grid system” to her work with her own company Leni-Basso (1994-2009) in which dancers run along an imaginary grid on stage while doing contact improvisations. After the company dissolved, she used combat-style contact improvisation, which she took from the old Asian martial arts, to develop dance scenes. Recently, she has been working on her Cross-Transit Project which involves research of traditional Asian dance, music, ritual and martial arts in different regions and collaboration with local artists. In 2019, she presented *Rhymes of Soil* (*Ryojin no uta*), the last chapter of this project. Ryojin, which means “the dust on the beam” is based on an old Chinese historical story: once a beautiful song moved the dust that had settled on a beam. She invited composer and musician Mayanglambam Mangangsana from Manipur (Northeastern India) to be dramaturg using the traditional musical instrument called the “pena” and traditional songs. Dancers took turns to improvise vocally (mimicking tabla and using children's word-play; a technique used in punglon, a type of Manipuri dance) and

exchanged swift and sinuous steps with bare feet.

Ide Shigehiro presented *phantom* (*gensoshindo*) with his group idevian crew. He also presented *Gimmicks* which he choreographed for dancers based in and around the Kyushu area. This piece was revived at Kitakyushu Performance Arts Center, and also in Miyazaki and Kumamoto prefectures. Ide exaggerates people's everyday movements, including habits and gestures, into dance motifs. His choreography sometimes matches the rhythm of the musical phrase, but may also avoid the beat. The element of instability combined with the interactions produce an exquisite groove, which is unique, cool and ironic.

The group Condors led by Kondo Ryohei presented *Like a Virgin*, a limited performance in Saitama, and went on a national tour with *Don't Stop Me Now*. For the opening performance of the newly opened Brilla Hall (Toshima Arts and Culture Theatre), he created a dance show called *Bridges to Babylon* together with 180 Toshima citizens. Condors uses loud rock music spiced up with refreshing and liberating dance. Their pieces include a sort of game of charades with live music, puppet theatre and video. They are extremely entertaining performances with lots of harmless humor and they have been popular among children and adults for a long time now.

Physical theatre company GERO led by Ito Kim presented *What Are You to Me?* (*Anatawa watashino nannano?*), *Dance and Chorus*

Without Scores by 100 people (*Hyakunin de suru gakufu no nai gassho*), *Dance and talk? or Talk and dance?* (*Odottekara shaberuka, shabettekara odoruka*). Voice, speech, body, and movement are broken down and reconstructed in a performance full of absurdity.

Onodera Shuji's Company Derashinera had been working on stage adaptations of novels recently, but the piece presented in 2019 called *Keep it simple–Mitate* (*Mitateru*) wasn't based on a novel. They went back to the company's roots and focused on nonverbal physical expression.

Nibroll led by Yanaihara Mikuni premiered *Drama Queen* (*Higekino hiroin*). They came up with a new style of dance by casting five actresses with minimal dance technique to play the role of a "tragic" heroine who constantly complains about the injustice of modern society and her own misfortunes.

Strange Kinoko Dance Company announced their disbandment right at the moment when the Heisei era ended and Reiwa began. This company, famous for its cute, upbeat dance that does not stick to any specific choreography system, was active for thirty years, performing not just in theatres but also in cafes, galleries and even outdoors. Many of their fans were loath to accept it.

Post 2000: The Role of the Public Sector is Questioned

Japanese contemporary dance was supported by the Mecenat

in the 90s, and by public venues and grants in the 2000s. After the bubble burst, Mecenat gradually went downhill, but the number of public cultural facilities grew, grant options expanded and art-related non-profit organizations became more prominent.

The most notable example of a publicly funded group is Noism, a residential dance company at Ryutopia Niigata City Performing Arts Center. Kanamori Jo is the artistic director of the theatre. Fifteen years after its founding in 2004, the company was almost forced to close due to the city's financial crisis and a new mayor. Their contract was eventually extended to August of 2022, but only on condition that they improve their current situation. They were required to change their name to Noism Company Niigata, to promote the city worldwide, to contribute more to the surrounding region, to hold more classes for students and citizens, to invite guest choreographers from outside the company, and to hire additional staff to avoid overwork.

To commemorate their fifteenth anniversary in 2019, Noism revived *Mirroring Memories* (winner of the Mainichi Art Award 2018) in its Niigata premiere, and presented *Fratres 1* for the first time. They also premiered *R.O.O.M., Mirror in the Mirror* as part of their *Experimental Dance Series Vol.1*. These were all medium-sized productions, but the idea was to enlarge their repertoire and make it easier to tour around the region and overseas. They also presented a double bill consisting of new pieces, one choreographed by

Kanamori and the other by Mori Yuki. Mori stepped down as the artistic director of Theater Regensburg Tanz in Germany and moved his base to Japan.

At TPAM 2019, ANTIBODIES Collective led by Higashino Yoko and Kajiware Toshio presented *Cassette 100*. This piece is a re-creation of a multimedia performance premiered in Manila by composer Jose Maceda in 1971. A hundred participants walked around the high-ceilinged foyer of Kanagawa Arts Theatre each playing ethnic music on a cassette player. Many theatre producers from overseas greatly enjoyed it. They also returned to Inujima in Okayama prefecture with their piece *Entropical paradise—2nd Chapter—* (*Entropy no rakuen dai nisho*). An event called Dance Truck Tokyo was organized by Japan Dance Truck Association for which Higashino acts as a representative. This took place at five different locations in Tokyo using a shipping container as a theatre and featuring different artists each day. They are planning to perform in fifteen different locations within Tokyo prefecture including the islands up until the fall of 2020.

Suzuki Yukio presented *The Promise of Stars* (*Hoshi no yakusoku*), a piece created by middle and high school students in a workshop hosted by Yamato Art Culture Hall. In *Life Spins, Time Flows* (*Jinseiwo tsumuguyoni tokino nagarewo kizamuyoni*) produced by Sagami-hara Culture Foundation, Suzuki gave a one night only performance on the rooftop of a department store that was scheduled

to close. This performance beautifully concluded the shared history of a store and a community.

Kitao Wataru not only put on *jungle-concrete-jungle!* with his own group Baobab, but also presented a showcase *Tokyo Dig/Rise* that originated in a workshop hosted by Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre. He also acted as a director of *Kichijoji Dance Rewrite Vol.1*, a project aimed at revitalizing the next generation of contemporary dance artists which was hosted by Kichijoji Theatre.

Since 2010, publicly-funded or co-sponsored productions have become more prominent, while the number of independent productions has decreased. Fewer subsidies are granted to contemporary dance projects, and the contemporary dance boom which was at its peak in the 2000s is now fading, and artists are having a difficult time attracting audiences. Even choreographers who won competitions or were successful overseas cannot sell enough tickets. They have no choice but to raise money through crowdfunding. Some artists are not willing to put on a show unless they get a grant.

Social Trends and Dance Style

There are now fewer opportunities for artists to create pieces suitable in scale for theatres. Instead, they present their pieces, which are likely to be site-specific, at theatre festivals.

Kamimura Megumi presented her piece *Strange Green Powder*

as part of F/T 19, which was performed in a tearoom in a Japanese garden. This subtle performance improvises physically on the preparatory ritual and the allusive “mitate” style of the tea ceremony.

Saori Hala who is based in Berlin, presented *no room* in the former Ex-Noguchi Room and its garden, designed by Isamu Noguchi and Taniguchi Yoshiro, a historical building located on the Mita campus of Keio University. This was a pre-event of Dance New Air 2020. The piece questioned the identity of artists by comparing Hala’s own life with the life of Isamu Noguchi, who wrestled with the problems of his mixed nationality and copyright difficulties.

Tokikatachi led by Obana Aiko presented an interactive performance where performers walk around all three floors of an empty building as part of Bakurocho Art Project *Beyond Façade*. The performers communicated with the audience non-verbally in this building, in what was once a wholesaling district. Performers and the audience shared the shadowy space vacated by the wholesalers.

So, dance is always affected by the social background of the period. The artists I mention here are interested in freeing themselves from dance itself as opposed to showing off their dance techniques in theatres. Fortunately, audiences are mostly generous enough to try to see the piece for what it is without bias, to understand the intention of the artists and to absorb the dancers’ physical awareness. Although lack of literacy rarely leads to abusive or

insulting language, most of these works are difficult to explain or verbalize and are therefore less likely to win proper recognition.

The Need for Dance Literacy

In the case of Aichi Triennale, a courageous program, to which a positive public reaction was anticipated, was confronted with “art-phobia” provoked by a spate of internet trolling which resulted in conflict and divisions. The incident set a bad example of a public organization easily giving into threats. Shortly before the closing of the exhibition, Takayama Akira, one of the artists participating in the festival, came up with the idea of setting up the “J Art Call Center” where artists could personally answer phone calls from the general public. In my humble opinion, the host organization should have prepared for such an eventuality from the beginning.

Art museums and theatres should play a permanent role in educating their audiences in art literacy. In that sense it could also be said that the dance field is not sufficiently serious about educating its audience and fanbase.

Tsutsumi, Hiroshi

Born in 1966 in Kawasaki. He graduated in theatre studies in the department of literature at Bunka Gakuin. He is an editor, theatre critic, and digital marketer. He went freelance after working as editor for art magazine *art vision*, entertainment magazine *apo*, theatre magazine *Engeki Book* and play script magazine *Serifu No Jidai*. His editorial work includes *The Revival of the Acharaka Theatre (Acharaka Saitanjo)* by Soratobu Kumonouedan Goro-ichiza, performing arts magazine *Bacchus, Performing Arts in Contemporary Germany (Gendai doitsu no performing arts)*, Peter Brook's *The Road to "Battlefield" (Peter Brook—"Battlefield" sosaku no kiseki)* and more.

(Translation: Ishikawa Mai, Donncha Crowley)

Television Dramas

TV Dramas Raising Questions about Our Mindset

Nakamachi Ayako

Tension Created in Original Scenarios of Mystery Dramas

In 2019, a mystery drama produced from an original script and delivered simultaneously on SNS and VOD attracted attention. *Your Turn to Kill* (*Anata no ban desu*, i.e. ‘It’s your turn’) (NTV) was neither based on a novel nor a manga but it was the viewers who solved the mysteries and guessed the perpetrator (referred to as ‘examine’) on SNS, which created excitement for them. The newlywed couple Tezuka Shota (played by Tanaka Kei) and Nana (Harada Tomoyo) move to a new apartment and get involved in a murder game. It begins as a small talk at the monthly residents’ meeting and those who are involved get killed one after another. This drama series was broadcast for six months although most series usually conclude in three months. One of the main characters, Nana, is killed in the last episode of Season I and the theme of Season II is “revenge”. Many characters appeared in the series and someone was killed every week. It was an entertainment proactively arousing the viewers’ interest through SNS and this new approach drew attention. Conceived and planned by Akimoto Yasushi, script by Fukuhara Mitsunori.

Mr. Hiiragi's Homeroom (3-nen A-gumi: Ima kara mina san wa hitojichi desu, i.e. '3rd Grade A Class–You've now been taken hostage') (NTV) was an original mystery drama set at a high school. The homeroom teacher Hiiragi Ibuki (Suda Masaki) takes his students hostage and barricades himself inside the school for ten days, just before their graduation. Hiiragi makes his students "take this class" in order to think for themselves and find out the truth about the death of their classmate (Kamishiraishi Moka) who committed suicide six months ago. The teacher relentlessly questions his students who avoid looking at the truth and their dialogue is full of tension. The setting is quite extreme such as threatening to blow up the school building or that giving the wrong answer means someone has to die but it passionately raises a question that the young people of today should be confronting. The script was written by Muto Shogo. The series won the Grand Prize of the Drama Series category and Suda Masaki won the Prize for Best Leading Actor of the Tokyo Drama Awards 2019. Suda also won the Individual Award in the TV category of the 56th Galaxy Awards (the programme *dele* was also considered).

Dramas Set in Workplaces Depicting Recent Work Styles

Different ways of thinking among generations often create dramatic situations at work. 'The Work Style Reform Bill' was partially put into effect in April 2019 and brought about major changes in people's mentality, especially regarding the long-hour working environment. The Tuesday Drama Series *No Working After Hours!*

(*Watashi, teiji de kaerimasu*, i.e. 'I'm Going Home at a Fixed Hour') (TBS), aired from April, highlighted the confusion and the different ways of thinking among working people. The secondary title of the first episode was "For the Era of a New Working Style! The Woman Who Always Left Work at the Fixed Hour". Higashiyama Yui (Yoshitaka Yuriko) is a software development director. She finishes work at the fixed hour and enjoys her time after work at her favourite restaurant. She gradually changes the mindset of her co-workers and clients who cannot break away from the practice of working long hours and from power harassment. The heroine's easy-going mode of living was suggested to the viewers. Based on the novel by Akeno Kaeruko, the script was written by Okudera Satoko and Shimizu Yukako. The drama series won the Monthly Galaxy Award in June 2019.

The heroine showing her resolute attitude at her workplace in Drama 10: *We Can't Pay You for This!* (*Kore wa keihi de ochimasen!*, i.e. 'Cannot spend company expense on this!') (NHK) was exhilarating. Moriwaka Sanako (Tabe Mikako) works in the accounting department of a company making soaps and bath salts. She performs her role, processing each account by making precise judgments. By doing so, she cuts through each section's old ways of doing things, which eventually eases the rigid organizational climate. Based on Aoki Yuko's manga *We Can't Pay You for This! Ms. Morikawa of Accounting Department*, the script was written by Watanabe Chiho, Fujihira Hisako and Hiruta Naomi.

An excellent drama depicting the realities and difficult situations that the staff of television companies experience also attracted attention. The HTB 50th Anniversary Drama: *Channeru wa sonomama!* (i.e. ‘Stay tuned!’) (Hokkaido Television) is based on the manga with the same title by Sasaki Noriko, who gathered materials from Hokkaido Television to write the story. Yukimaru Hanako (Yoshine Kyoko) is a less-than-able reporter, who has just joined the news department of the Hokkaido Hoshi Television. She exerts herself in a bold and dashing manner, which is her own unique way of doing things. Her demeanour was depicted vividly in the drama. The script was written by Mori Hayashi. The drama won the Grand Prize in the TV Drama category of the Awards presented by The National Association of Commercial Broadcasters in Japan in 2019.

Srou na bushi ni shitekure-Kyoto satsueijo rapusodi (i.e. ‘Make it a slow warrior – Kyoto Studio Rhapsody’) (NHK) was about creating a period drama using NHK’s state-of-the-art equipment such as drones and high-speed cameras that were brought on location. It was a piece of entertainment shown in the style of behind-the-scenes drama. The passion of the actors and the staff’ struggling with the latest technology was conveyed in a refreshing tone and manner. Minamoto Takashi both wrote and directed this drama, which won the 74th Agency for Cultural Affairs National Arts Festival Award for Excellence in the TV Drama category in 2019.

Looking at the Essence of the Characters' Loose Bonds

There were appealing TV dramas that made us look at things in our daily lives that are important for us and gradually changed our way of thinking. Drama 24: *What Did You Eat Yesterday?* (*Kinou nani tabeta?*) (TV Tokyo) depicted the everyday life of the lawyer Shiro-san (Nishijima Hidetoshi) and the hairdresser Kenji (Uchino Seiyō), who are lovers living together, focusing on them sitting down at the dinner table. Shiro-san is passionate about cooking dinner and when the two men have dinner together, they show their deep affection for each other. Fulfillment and warmth could be felt from the depiction of their everyday life. The script based on the manga by Yoshinaga Fumi was written by Adachi Naoko.

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The Tuesday Drama: *You and I on G String* (*G sen jou no anata to watashi*) (TBS) portrays the traumas, confusions and hesitations of the twenty-five year old office worker Kogure Yaeko (Haru), the forty-one year old housewife Kitagawa Yukie (Matsushita Yuki), the nineteen-year old college student Kase Rihito (Nakagawa Taishi) and the instructor Kuzumi Mao (Sakurai Yuki), who have met at a violin class run by a musical instrument store. They cannot find a way out of their adverse situations and what the characters go through in their minds is depicted at a slow pace. The script was written by Adachi Naoko based on a manga by Ikueumi Ryo.

The same goes for Saturday Drama: *If Talking Paid, My Story is Long* (*Ore no hanashi wa nagai*) (Nippon TV). The protagonist

Kishibe Mitsuru (Ikuta Toma) is a thirty-one year old 'NEET' (i.e. Not in Education, Employment or Training) and lives with his mother Fusae (Harada Mieko). He quits university and starts running a coffee shop, which has been his dream, but it does not work out. He has not had a regular job for six years. It is a domestic drama that begins when his elder sister Akiba Ayako (Koike Eiko), her husband Koji (Yasuda Ken), and their young daughter Harumi (Kiyohara Kaya) return to their mother's house to live together for a while. Driven by his strong-minded elder sister, Mitsuru's pointless arguments heat up. Through their dialogues, their true feelings slip out and Mitsuru and the other members of the family slowly find a chance to move forward. It was a drama series using an original script. Each episode was thirty minutes long and two episodes were broadcasted every time. The script was written by Kaneko Shigeki, the chief producer was Ikeda Kenji and the producers were Hazeyama Hiroko and others.

There were other dramas about slowly moving through life. One of them was *The Man Who Can't Get Married Yet* (*Mada kekkon dekinai otoko*)(Fuji TV, starring Abe Hiroshi, script by Ozaki Masaya), which was remade after thirteen years. The other production that also attracted attention was Friday Night Drama: *Nagi's Long Vacation* (*Nagi no Oitoma*) (TBS, starring Kuroki Haru, based on Konari Misato's comic book, script by Oshima Satomi), depicting a heroine who quits her job because she is tired of trying to fit in by adjusting herself to the people around her and

moves to the suburbs.

Having the Strength to Venture into Social Issues

There were some excellent television dramas dealing with current themes and social issues. The NHK Special Drama: *Phone Fraud Children (Sagi no ko)* (NHK Nagoya) was produced through carrying out in-depth interviews about an actual case. The portraits of both the perpetrator and the victim of the fraud were depicted, highlighting the unconscious sense of guilt in the junior high school child who was responsible for the scam, the young people who are at the centre of an unequal society, and also the misery of the victims. The structural aspects of a complicated crime, the multilateral depiction and the critical spirit stood out. (It was written by Takada Ryo and directed by Kawakami Takeshi. This production won the Excellence Award of the Single Drama category of Tokyo Drama Awards 2019, The Best TV Drama Award of the Programme category of the 45th Hoso Bunka Foundation Awards and the Encouragement Prize of the TV category of the 56th Galaxy Awards.

The Saturday Drama: *Swindle Detective (Sagideka)* (NHK) also dealt with fraud cases. Imamiya Karen (Kimura Fumino), a detective working for the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, is in charge of bank transfer fraud cases and is busy charging fraud groups. The details of the cases and the systematic approach of the criminal gangs had a sense of reality and the characters who were

trying to make their way in the modern world were appealing as well. (The script was written by Adachi Naoko. The drama won the Grand Prize in the TV Drama category of the 74th Agency for Cultural Affairs National Arts Festival and the Encouragement Prize of the 57th Galaxy Awards for the first half of 2019.)

The Saturday Drama: *Digital Tattoo* (NHK) depicted people who were driven into the corner due to defamation or having their personal information spread on the internet. The script was written by Asano Taeko and it won the Award for Excellence in the Television Drama category of the 74th Agency for Cultural Affairs National Arts Festival (2019).

There was also a growing interest in sports during 2019. The Rugby World Cup was held in Japan, stirring excitement and the national team's slogan "one team" became a buzzword. Sunday Theatre: *No Side Manager (No Side Game)* (TBS, script written by Ushio Kentaro, based on the novel by Ikeido Jun), depicting the rebirth of a corporate rugby team, was broadcast just before the games and drew attention. In addition, the historical drama series *Idaten: Tokyo orinpikku banashi* (i.e. 'Idaten: A Tale of the Tokyo Olympics') (NHK, script by Kudo Kankuro) was also aired, depicting the history until the Tokyo Olympics was held in 1964, as a step toward the upcoming Tokyo Olympic Games in the summer of 2020.

Nakamachi, Ayako

A professor of Nihon University College of Art. She works as a member of the Selection Committee of the Executive Committee of the Agency for Cultural Affairs National Arts Festival Awards and the selection committee of broadcast-related awards including International Drama Festival's Tokyo Drama Awards. She has written critical essays, mainly about television dramas, for newspapers such as *Ano drama, kono serifu* (i.e. 'That drama, this line') for Nikkei Shimbun and 'Antenna' for Yomiuri Shimbun. She has also written books including *Nippon no terebi drama nijuichi no meizerifu* (i.e. 'Famous lines from twenty-one Japanese TV dramas').

(Translation: Sumida Michiyo)



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トピックス

Developments in Japan and Overseas

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Photographer: Nishimura Atsushi

Theatre Topics

A Theatre that Continues to Challenge —The Rebirth of PARCO Theater

Sugiyama Hiromu

The Scramble Intersection in Shibuya is in a festive mood, packed with young people on days when the national football team of Japan wins a match at the world cup. People also gather there for Halloween wearing original clothes and again on New Year's Eve. In recent years, many foreign visitors flock there to take selfies. The area is now known as a meeting spot for young people but fifty

years ago, it was a quiet town where Shibuya River flowed and residential areas co-existed with red-light districts and restaurants.

Shibuya changed drastically when the Tokyo Olympics took place in 1964. The Olympic Village was built in nearby Yoyogi Park. The swimming competition and basketball games were held at Yoyogi National Gymnasium and weightlifting events at Shibuya Public Hall, and the public broadcaster NHK began to relocate from Uchisaiwaicho to Shibuya. PARCO Theater (called Seibu Gekijo up until 1985) opened in 1973, the year NHK completed relocation. Politics was the centre of focus back then. Shinjuku was the centre of youth culture, where modern theatre productions were performed by Shingeki (i.e. 'new theatre') troupes such as Bungakuza and Mingei Theatre Company as well as underground theatre groups. In Ginza and the adjacent Hibiya area, Kabuki and Takarazuka's revue shows were presented. Shinjuku and the Ginza-Hibiya areas were the two main theatre hubs during that time but when PARCO Theater opened, the theatre map started to change.

One of the main driving forces was the 'Saison Culture Initiative', suggesting a new lifestyle to many young people who were looking for something new by organizing cultural infrastructure and PARCO Theater took a central role. They used pop TV commercials and posters for advertisement and also opened affiliated facilities nearby, namely PARCO Museum, Cine Quinto and

Club Quattro to promote what is now called “edgy” culture in the fields of fine arts, movies and music. PARCO Theater also experimented with various kinds of projects besides theatre. In addition to putting on the latest plays written by Abe Kobo and Yamazaki Masakazu, they produced ‘Music Today’, which was planned, organized and supervised by contemporary music composers, Takemitsu Toru and Takahashi Yuji, and became a series. Their programme was full of variety and it included concerts, ballet and contemporary dance performances and fashion. Going to Shibuya meant you could get in touch with something new and stylish. The young generation responded to this strategy.

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Yabuhara, the Blind Master Minstrel (1973)

Even from a theatrical point of view, the plays they presented were unique. PARCO Theater produced new plays to find new theatre creators and set a new trend. A music theatre production written by Inoue Hisashi and directed by Kimura Koichi attracted tremendous interest. This was followed by premieres of notable pieces such as *Yabuhara, the Blind Master Minstrel* (Yabuhara kengyo)(1973), which was invited to the Edinburgh Festival, *Shakespeare in the Twelfth Year of the Tempo Era*

(*Tempo juninen no Shakespeare*)(1974), which included all thirty-seven plays written by Shakespeare, and *Ame* (i.e. 'rain')(1976), which was a play about people getting tied up by power through conflicts created by words, all of which are known by theatre fans today. PARCO Theater also brought on board the standard-bearers of the underground theatre movement, who had presented ambitious and controversial plays one after another in tent theatres and small theatres, and presented Terayama Shuji's *The Miraculous Mandarin* (*Chugoku no fushigi na yakunin*)(1977) and *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* (*Aohigeko no shiro*)(1979), Tsuka Kohei's *The Day the Atomic Bomb is Dropped on Hiroshima* (*Hiroshima ni genbaku o otosu hi*)(1979), *The Story of Shitaya Mannencho* (*Shitaya mannencho monogatari*)(1981) written by Kara Juro and directed by Ninagawa Yukio, and *Tango at the End of Winter* (*Tango fuyuno owarini*)(1984), written by Shimizu Kunio and directed by Ninagawa Yukio.

This trend accelerated when PARCO Space Part 3 opened nearby in 1982. At Parco Space Part 3, Miyamoto Amon, who was still unknown, directed *Ich bin Weill* (1989) and when it was well-received, he was offered to direct musicals at PARCO Theater. He presented *Astaire by Myself* (1990) and *Girls Time* (1995) among other productions, which lead to his *Pacific Overtures* on Broadway (2004). The playwright Mitani Koki also started off at PARCO Space Part 3 with *The Gentle Twelve* (*Juninin no yasashii nihonjin*)(1992) and *Dah! Dah! Dah!* (1993), and later on made his debut at PARCO Theater, which then became his home ground.



Academy of Laughter (1996)

He wrote new plays for the theatre starting with *No Exit!* (*Deguchi nashi!*)(1994), followed by *Nobody Else But You* (*Kimi to nara*)(1995) and *By Myself* (1997). *Academy of Laughter* (*Warai no daigaku*), which was premiered at Aoyama Round Theatre in 1996 and was revived at PARCO Theater in 1998. Mitani has written a total of twenty-three plays produced by PARCO Theater. Even after 2000, PARCO Theater continued to commission

young theatre people for its projects; namely Nagatsuka Keishi's *My Rock'n Roll Star* (2002), Kudo Kankuro's *Dumb Beast* (*Donju*) (2004), Horai Ryuta's *LOVE 30* (*LOVE 30 Otoko to onna no monogatari 'Ani eno dengen'*)(2006), Motoya Yukiko's *[I'm] Happy, [This is] Fantastic, Thank You, Really!* (*Shiawase Saiko Arigato Majide!*)(2008), Maekawa Tomohiro's *Enter Through the Narrow Gate* (*Semaki mon yori haire*)(2009), Iwai Hideto's *A Recluse Wants to Go Outside* (*Hikky, soto ni detemitano*) (2012) and Nozoe Seiji's *My Hole, His Hole* (*Boku no ana, kare no ana*)(2016).

Another major characteristic was that PARCO Theater boldly took on the challenge of presenting foreign plays regarded as difficult to put on at other theatres. The most impressive play was Mart Crowley's *The Boys in the Band* (1983), which is about gay men who

gather at a birthday party one night, portraying their solitude, alienation, self-hatred and other dark sides of the human mind. It was premiered on Broadway in 1968 and was made into a movie in 1970 but when you think about the social conditions back then in Japan, it is easy to imagine how much courage it took to present a play with a homosexual man as the central character. The audience supported the production and it was followed by Martin Sherman's *Bent* and Harvey Fierstein's *Torch Song Trilogy* in 1986, and the series was regarded as 'a gay trilogy'.

PARCO Theater also premiered Neil Simon's plays in Japan. Quick to recognise the Broadway-hitmaker, the theatre presented *The Odd Couple* (1979), *Chapter Two* (1981) and *I Ought to be in Pictures* (1982) in a row and created a Neil Simon boom. It also turned the spotlight on the richness of Irish theatre through presenting Martin McDonagh's black comedy titled *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2003), which was directed by Nagatsuka Keishi, as well as *Pillow Man* (2004) and *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (2007). Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9*, which has a strong social message, was also presented at PARCO Theater, revived several times at PARCO Space Part 3 and then mounted at PARCO Theater again in 1995, making the play into a memorable long-term commitment. It also



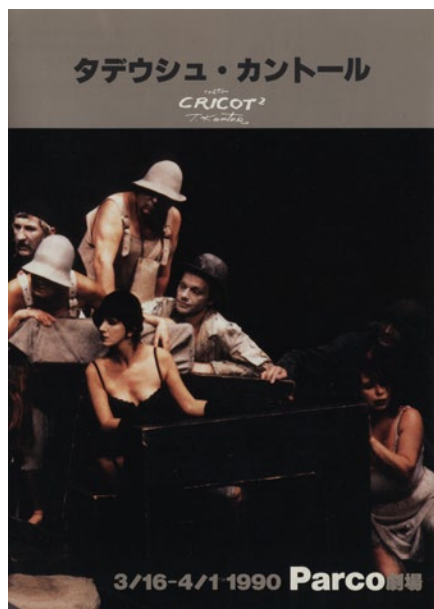
The Boys in the Band (1983)

presented numerous stimulating productions to the Japanese audience, including Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1985), David Mamet's *American Buffalo* (1986) and a Sam Shepard season consisting of *Buried Child*, *True West* and *Fool for Love* (1986).

During the economic boom in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, PARCO also started inviting companies from abroad such as the Georgian State Theatre, Merce Cunningham Dance Company, Theater Na Yugo-Zapade and Oleg Tabakov Theatre from Moscow, Mokwha Repertory Company from South Korea and the Shanghai Kunqu Opera from China. The most impressive foreign company was Cricot 2 led by Tadeusz Kantor based in Krakow in Poland, which presented its masterpiece *The Dead Class* (1982) and *Let the Artists Die* (1990), and seeing those productions was enthralling, never to be forgotten. PARCO Theater also invited Compagnie Philippe Genty's puppet shows, which portrayed dream worlds by integrating pantomime, puppet shows and circus acts. The company's performances were well received and it was invited back to Japan several times, making a unique achievement for PARCO Theater.

Meanwhile, the two-hander musical *Show Girl* (1974) and the reading of *Love Letters* (1990) were small in scale but should be mentioned because they created new trends in the Japanese theatre scene. *Show Girl* was a stylish love story performed by Hosokawa Toshiyuki and Kinomi Nana with music, dialogues and dance. Fukuda Yoichiro wrote, devised and directed the show

and his sophisticated taste alongside Miyagawa Yasushi's exquisite choice of music created a show full of fun and surprises. It was put on every year for sixteen years until 1988 and now Mitani Koki has succeeded Fukuda to write and direct the show with Kabira Jay and Sylvia Grab forming the duo. *Love Letters* is a simple show with an actor and actress sitting on chairs and reading A. R. Gurney's script written as letters that they wrote to each other. It has been performed with different cast every time and has been kept fresh as the actors only do one read-through before performing the play, which has been performed 467 times over twenty-six years (including readings at venues other than PARCO Theater). Aoi Yoji translated and directed the play but



Let the Artists Die (1990)



Show Girl (1974)

after he passed away, Fujita Shuntaro took over his place and has been directing it since 2017. It is needless to say that this long-lasting project was the beginning of ‘dramatic reading’, which has become very popular nowadays.

Unlike star-led productions, in which the cast is decided by the top star, or plays performed by theatre companies, which prioritize some other logic, the producers of PARCO Theater produced shows with the interest of the piece itself in mind, which is the essential model for theatre-making, and this was a significant turning point. Moreover, PARCO Theater was unique in that it carried on its endeavor to create new types of plays for the audience. In other words, they presented a consistent image by putting on pieces that matched their policy, welcomed by curious young people and created the atmosphere of Shibuya. It is not too much to say that Shibuya was formed through a culture emanating from theatre. PARCO’s competitor Tokyu Group, which also owns a railway company and a department store, opened theatre facilities one after another in Shibuya. The first one was a large-scale cultural complex called Bunkamura that opened in 1989, containing Orchard Hall and Theatre Cocoon. Cerulean Tower Noh Theatre followed in 2001 and then Theatre Orb in 2012. In this way, they have enhanced their image as a cultural provider. The Tokyu Group has undoubtedly been influenced by the Saison Culture, and Shibuya has now become one of the hubs for theatre performances.

Public theatres, namely Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre that

opened in 1990, Saitama Arts Theater that opened in 1994, and the New National Theatre, Tokyo and Setagaya Public Theatre that opened in 1997, have continued to create new productions by appointing directors as their artistic directors. The theatre distribution map is about to change once again but even though the theatre closed in 2016, PARCO Theater's production team has staged Mishima Yukio's *The Sea of Fertility (Hojo no umi)* in 2018 and has continued to present stimulating pieces such as Ferdinand von Schirach's court drama *Terror* (2018), Lucy Kirkwood's *Children* (2018), which reminds us of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant incident, and Lucas Hnath's *A Doll's House, Part 2* (2019), which is a sequel to the modern classic play. As long as they stick to their challenging policy, they will keep providing topics and expectations, since PARCO Theater has no small role to play in the Japanese theatre scene.

Sugiyama, Hiromu

A theatre journalist. He was born in Shizuoka in 1957. He joined Yomiuri Newspaper in 1981. For around thirty years until 2017, he wrote theatre articles and reviews as well as running the Yomiuri Theatre Awards. He is also the director of the Association of Japanese Theatre Companies and a member of the selection committee of Hayakawa Tragedy and Comedy Award.

Visuals of flyers provided by: PARCO Co., Ltd.

(Translation: Sumida Michiyo)

Playzone 1986-2014 Thank you! Aoyama Theatre (July 2014, Aoyama Theatre)

Theatre Topics

“The-Show-Must-Go-On” —In Memory of Johnny Kitagawa

Hayashi Naoyuki

On July 9, 2019, Johnny Kitagawa, the CEO of major entertainment company Johnny & Associates and a producer of numerous idols, passed away. He was eighty-seven years old. He hardly ever appeared in front of the press while he was alive but his death attracted a lot of media coverage.

Johnny Kitagawa produced young boys that could sing and

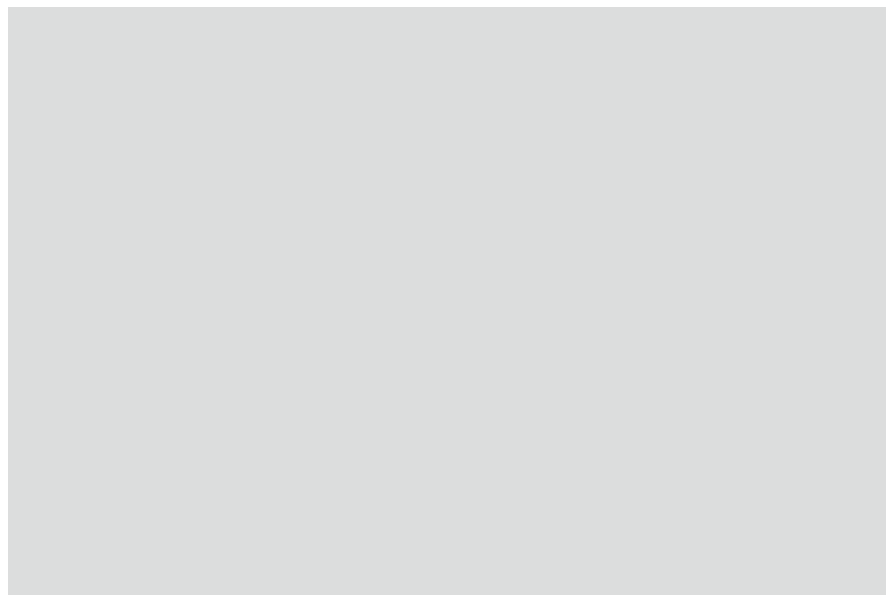
dance, who were a new type of idols. He nurtured popular boy bands beginning with Johnny's, followed by Four Leaves, Tanokin Trio, Shibugakitai, Shonentai, Hikaru Genji, SMAP, Tokio, V6, Kinki Kids, Arashi and others. At the same time, he was a producer and director who brought about enormous changes in the Japanese musical industry. He was involved in theatre for more than half a century. In April 1965, some members of Johnny's performed in *Flaming Curve* (*Hono no kabu*), written and directed by the novelist Ishihara Shintaro and presented at Nissay Theatre. In 1963, two years previously, *My Fair Lady* was presented at Shinjuku Koma Theater. It was the first Broadway musical to be shown in Japan. He pioneered musical theatre in Japan, when it was not a popular genre.

Johnny Kitagawa was born in Los Angeles, USA. He became interested in show business at an early age and when he returned to Japan after the Korean War, he formed a boys' baseball team called Johnny's at Washington Heights, a housing complex for the US military, where he lived. One day, on his day off, he went to see the musical film *West Side Story* with four boys in the team. He was entranced by the movie and in 1962, he founded Johnny & Associates with the four boys and entered the world of entertainment. The name given to the first group he produced was Johnny's. It was the 1960s, when Japan was recovering from devastations of war, the economy was growing rapidly and people were seeking affluence. This was how the history of Johnny & Associates began.

In 1966, Johnny's performed in *Treasure Island (Takarajima)* written and directed by Ishihara and presented at Nissay Theatre. Johnny's letterzine 'J&M', which started in 1967, stands for "Johnny's and Musicals", showing the passion he had for musicals even back then. The four members of Johnny's went to the US and took voice and dance lessons and learned their trade, so to speak. In 1967, Johnny Kitagawa wrote and presented *Sometime, Somewhere-The Story About the Four Leaves (Itsuka dokokade -Four Leaves monogatari)*. The stars of the show became the group Four Leaves that was formed after the Johnny's. In 1969, *Four Leaves Young Surprise 'The Boys' (Four Leaves Young Surprise 'Shonentachi')* was premiered and it became the origin of *The Boys (Shonentachi)* which continued to be performed for over fifty years.

Shonentai's original musical *Playzone* was launched in 1986 and performed annually at Aoyama Theatre. At the beginning, Johnny Kitagawa was purely a producer and invited directors from outside the company but he later wrote and directed the shows himself. In 1990, he asked Ninagawa Yukio to direct *Hamlet*, as a play within one of his shows. He began to collaborate with Ninagawa Yukio, who had already won high acclaim outside Japan. Okamoto Ken-ichi, Kimura Takuya, Okada Jun-ichi, Morita Go, Ninomiya Kazunari, Matsumoto Jun and other talents who belong to Johnny & Associates played the leads in Ninagawa's productions. Ninagawa's intense directions helped them grow as actors. It was Johnny Kitagawa who had paved the way for them.

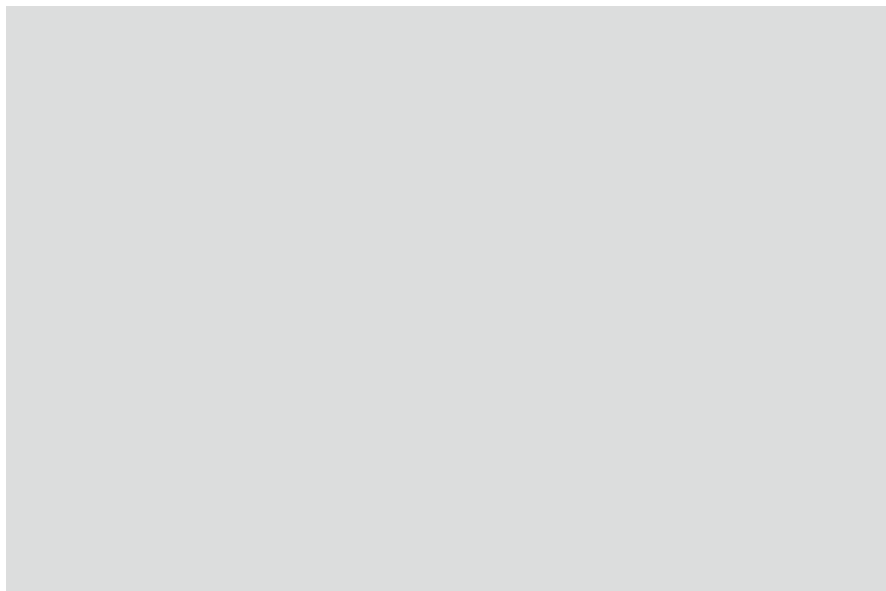
Shonentai starred in Playzone until 2008 and they were succeeded by Imai Tsubasa and other junior casts for fifteen years until Aoyama Theatre closed in 2014. There was another series titled *Show Play (Show Geki)*, in which Shonentai starred in 1992, Sakamoto Masayuki, Inohara Yoshihiko and Okada Jun-ichi in 1997, Takizawa Hideaki in 1998 and Domoto Koichi in 1999. Then at long last in 2000 came *Shock*, which was written, devised and directed by Johnny Kitagawa, starring Domono Koichi, and premiered at the Imperial Theatre. The Imperial Theatre is the hub theatre for Toho Co., Ltd., a major entertainment company in Japan, and it is a theatre just as prestigious as Kabuki-za. It gives stage actors special status to star in a show at the Imperial Theatre.



Millennium Shock (November 2000, Imperial Theatre)
Photograph provided by: Theatrical Department of Toho Co., Ltd.

Some people objected putting on a Johnnys' show at the Imperial but it proved to be extremely popular and the tickets were sold out straight away after they were put on sale. The quality of the production itself was very high and they soon stopped criticizing. It has been performed over 1,700 times as of 2019 and has become a regular show. Johnny used to say, "Keep on doing what you think is good. Just do your own thing and it will be wonderful," and his belief was unshakeable.

In 2004, *Dream Boy* was launched, starring Takizawa. At present, *Shock*, *Johnnys' Island*, and other Johnnys' shows are presented at the Imperial Theatre for four to six months of the year. In



2006, Toho's rival Shochiku also premiered *Takizawa Enbujo* starring Takizawa at Shinbashi Enbujo and the show with a Japanese traditional taste was presented a number of times. This show evolved into *Takizawa Kabuki* in 2010 and became a regular show at Enbujo from 2014. Moreover, *A.B.C-Z Johnnys' Legend (ABC-za Johnnys densetsu)* and *The Boys (Shonentachi)* was presented at Nissay Theatre and *Johnnys' Ginza* was presented at Theater Creation. Nowadays you can see a Johnnys' show somewhere in Tokyo every month of the year.

Johnny & Associates acquired its own theatre called the Globe Tokyo. The theatre that opened in 1988 during the economic bubble, was handed over to Johnny & Associates in 2002 and is now run by a group company. In 2004, a season of *West Side Story* was presented at the Globe with Higashiyama Noriyuki and Nishikiori Kazukiyo of Shonentai and Sakurai Sho and Matsumoto Jun of Arashi playing the lead. Johnny Kitagawa had finally realized his dream of forty years to present *West*

Side Story.

His passion for creating stage productions that no one has seen before was quite extraordinary. When *Shock* was premiered, he insisted that the actors should not just fly on stage but also above the audience. Holes were made in the ceiling of the Imperial Theatre urgently to make it happen. He went to Broadway and Las Vegas to see shows and when he found a staging that inspired him, he would pay an expensive license fee to use it in his own shows. He was among the first to introduce large-scale LED Vision and projection mapping, and his ability to predict future trends was remarkable. “If there is one minute you don’t like during the three-hour show, you’ll get your money back.” He was quite confident that the audience would enjoy his shows.

Ninagawa Yukio, who it was said would throw ashtrays at actors during rehearsals if he did not like the way they performed, was forced to admit, “I can’t do that” when he saw Domoto Koichi fall down twenty-two steps in *Shock*. Johnny Kitagawa’s staging was fraught with danger but it must have been because there was a deep trust between him and Domoto Koichi that made it possible to work together at this level. Extraordinary staging and gimmicks fraught with hazards such as trapeze, sword-fighting under an artificial waterfall using tens of tons of water and playing Japanese drums while spinning 360 degrees were Johnny Kitagawa’s ideas. His freewheeling “anything goes” thinking combined the East and

West. “I don’t want to do what’s already been done in other musicals or stage shows. Other people’s ideas belong to them and I don’t want to mix them up with my ideas.” He did indeed come up with genius ideas.

His unshakable belief was reflected in his shows. Johnny Kitagawa returned from the States during the war and lived in Osaka but when the air raids intensified, he evacuated to Wakayama Prefecture. He saw burnt ruins and many corpses. Drawing on his experiences, he depicted war scenes in *The Boys* and *Johnnys’ Island*, and had the boys play the parts of kamikaze pilots. He belonged to a generation with actual experience of war and while he presented spectacular shows, his focus was always on conveying the tragedies of war and the preciousness of peace.

In September, a memorial event was held at the Tokyo Dome to mourn his death. 3,500 people who had worked with him and 88,000 fans paid floral tribute. The leaflet handed out to those who attended carried this message from Johnny. “Although there are sadnesses in the world, our shows shall always end happily because I want the world to have a happy ending.” He wished for a peaceful world from the bottom of his heart.

Johnny Kitagawa always stayed in the background but in 2003, he received the Special Award of Kikuta Kazuo Theatre Awards for “his great passion and outstanding achievements in the world of

show business over many years”. In 2011, he was certified by the Guinness Book of Records for holding the world record in two categories, which were for producing the most concerts and for producing the most No. 1 singles, and again in 2012 for producing the most chart-topping singers.

Johnny Kitagawa made a significant contribution to the world of musicals by attracting new audiences. Musical audiences were limited for a long time until he had the idea of casting idols, who attracted a wider public. At first, people came to see their favourite idols but the more shows they saw, the more interested they became in theatre and in musicals. Cutting-edge staging grabbed their attention and would not let go, and they kept on coming for more. Johnny & Associates is now one of top three crowd-pulling entertainment companies besides Takarazuka Revue Company and Shiki Theatre Company, and it has also produced numerous musical actors.

Johnny Kitagawa often insisted that “the show must go on”, which was also the theme of some of his shows including *Shock*. The show must go on no matter what and even after his death, his shows did indeed go on.

Higashiyama Noriyuki co-directed *Johnnys' Island* in 2018 and Domoto Koichi worked on the script and staging of *Shock*. Takizawa retired as a performer but became a producer and the

vice president of Johnny & Associates, succeeding Johnny Kitagawa as the director of *Takizawa Kabuki*. He had created the necessary environment for his shows to continue after his own departure. Shortly after his death, ongoing productions such as *Dream Boy* and *Johnnys' Legend* were billed as “planned, written and directed by Johnny Kitagawa”, thus carrying on his vision. When *Endless Shock* was presented from February 2020, he was credited as “Eternal Producer”. He was the very embodiment of “the show must go on”.

Hayashi, Naoyuki

In 1978, he joined Nikkan Sports Newspaper, where he is mainly in charge of theatre and entertainment. He is on the selection committee of the Agency for Cultural Affairs National Arts Festival and Tsuruya Nanboku Memorial Award. He is an experts committee member of Japan Arts Fund Management Committee and a member of the committee for training programmes at the National Theatre, etc. He is also a member of the Japan Theater Arts Association.

(Translation: Sumida Michiyo)



Ground and Floor (2013) Kyoto Experiment 2013, Kyoto Prefectural Citizens' Hall Altī
©Shimizu Misako

Theatre Topics

The Era of Okada Toshiki – Performing Arts in the 2010s

Uchino Tadashi

When we consider the development of Japanese-language performing arts during the ten years of the 2010s, we can think of the period as the aftermath of the so-called 3.11 - the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011 and the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant that was caused by the earthquake. As of December 10, 2019, 15,899 people were dead,

6,157 seriously or slightly injured, and 2,529 reported missing because of the quake. It goes without saying that the earthquake and the nuclear accident had a great impact on the lives of so many people. The Fukushima nuclear accident is described as an accident here, but in connection with the historical political issue of the safety of nuclear power plants, which had been a problem since the end of World War II, it not only created many evacuees, but also led to anti-nuclear power movements involving a wide range of citizens and anti-government movements.

In the midst of these turbulent times, the performing arts in the Japanese-speaking world showed several characteristic trends in response to 3.11., and to some visible changes in socio-cultural living environments. One of them, of course, is how to deal with the problems of the earthquake. In conjunction with this, the question is how to think about the nuclear accident. Therefore, as a matter of course, many works were produced that dealt directly with the theme of community reconstruction and/or how to deal with the loss and those left behind in the disaster. With the passage of time, this kind of awareness of direct reference to the disaster tended to fade away, but even at the end of the 2010s, a masterpiece was created that boldly challenged the issue of the nuclear power plant accident from a historical perspective based on careful and meticulous research: Tani Ken'ichi's "Fukushima Trilogy," consisting of three full-length plays, *1961: The Sun Rising at Night*, *1986: The Mobius Strip* and *2011: Words Waiting to be Spoken*. Tani

recently received the 64th Kishida Kunio Drama Award for the trilogy. In a broader context, the decade witnessed the emergence of a large volume of work that can be called “plays of social critique” from the viewpoint of ordinary citizens, in conjunction with the rise of historical revisionism and economic inequality in society. These plays were often highly praised by basically liberal theatregoers in Japan.

What about the reexamination of the form of theatre itself, which had already shown this trend since the 2000s and is generally considered to have responded to the changing times, the era known as globalization? This is an attempt to reexamine the forms of theatre that are inseparably related to the changes in everyday life experiences, conscious or not, where the Internet has become part of the environment and social media has become a major means of communication for many people. Could it be said that this trend has accelerated since 3.11?

The artists, mainly born in the 1970s, who started their careers in the first decade of the 21st century, became the generation that felt a moral necessity to respond to 3.11., and I would argue that their methodological explorations have been deepening, albeit in small numbers, in terms of their theatrical experimentation. Representative examples include Okada Toshiki (1973–), a playwright and director of Chelfitsch; Tanino Kuro (1976–), a playwright and director of Niwa Gekidan Penino; and Yanaihara Mikuni (1971–),

a dancer, choreographer, playwright, and director of Nibroll.

Although these artists share a certain degree of similar aesthetic sentiments, their artistic outputs and political consciousness are quite different and should be discussed separately. However, due to the limited number of pages in this article, I would like to review the work of Toshiki Okada as an excellent example of the cultural and political characteristics of Japanese-language performing arts in the 2010s.

Okada, who won the 49th Kishida Kunio Drama Award for *Five days in March* (2004), is known for his actors' unique acting style. *Five days in March* portrays a young couple who just keep having sex at a love hotel in Shibuya before and after the US Invasion of Iraq in 2003. It is an ambitious work to depict the psycho-physical realities of young people, being sensitive to the geopolitical position of the nation of Japan at the time of its premiere, while they feel politically helpless. The theme and the narrative were not only felt to be “real” to the younger generation of the audience



Five days in March (2011) Kanagawa Arts Theatre ©Yokota Toru

members. The performance itself harbored the discovery of an innovative method of acting that could be called the grammar of the new performance style Okada created with the actors: the new and precarious relationship between the words of the play and the actors' bodies.

Actors just talk in their everyday colloquial language with seemingly undisciplined, somewhat sloppy gestures. Okada's acting theory, which is sometimes called "super-colloquial theatre," was nothing but an acute approach to the contemporary sense of body and language in the socio-cultural living environments of the people, where disciplinary power transformed itself into administrative power in the age of globalization and neo-liberalization. The dramatic text is sometimes written in the third person, as in a novel, while the characters speak in the present or past tense. However, despite these complicated narrative techniques, Okada/Chelfitsch's acting body was simply undisciplined from a traditional perspective, so his activities attracted small yet fervent attention from the peripheral sectors of theatre professionals. The mainstream was more annoyed, saying, "That's not theatre." Okada nevertheless came to be commissioned works by public theatres such as the New National Theatre and the Setagaya Public Theatre. For the New National, he presented *Enjoy* in 2006 (written and directed by Okada) and directed *Tattoo*, written by Dea Loher, in 2009. For the Setagaya Public Theatre, Okada directed *Friends* by Abe Kobo in 2008. Those were, according to Moriyama Naoto, "the

manifestations of strong expectations to do ordinary theatre” (*) for Okada, which he would turn down eventually after those attempts. He never continued his interest in works that relied on domestic, conservative notions of theatre.

That was because *Five days in March* had its first overseas performance in 2007 and made a big break in continental Europe. After that, Okada was able to continue his creation in the form of international joint productions; that is, without necessarily needing Japanese funds. This is where the market of performing arts as cultural capital unique to continental Europe can operate and where their exponents compete for a wide variety of theatrical aesthetics as a result of globalization. The old orientalism was no longer needed for the intellectually mature continental multiculturalism of Europe. Okada’s work, which intuitively grasped something universal about globalization, was enthusiastically accepted as being extremely fresh (= “universal”), regardless of the locality of Japan or the Japanese language. The first international co-production was *Free Time* (2008), written and directed by Okada and performed in Japanese by KUNSTENFESTIVALDESARTS (Brussels), Wiener Festwochen (Vienna), and Festival D’automne (Paris).



Free Time (2008) SuperDeluxe ©Yokota Toru

3.11. had a great influence on Okada, as it did on other artists. He left Tokyo and moved to Kumamoto because of the earthquake and the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Accident. The influence of this can be seen clearly in *Present Location*, premiered in 2012, which was a rather obvious reflection of the nuclear accident issue, and in *Ground and Floor* (2013), he took up the issues of the dead and the living in general, rather than the dead in the disaster. At that time, the desire to question the formal aspects of the performance itself was temporarily abandoned, and the direction was changed to share his own unique world view with the audience, using the here and now of theatre, while redefining the meaning of fiction and drama in theatre, and utilizing the unique acting method that had already been established. It was followed by *Super Premium Soft Vanilla Rich* (2014), which tackled the problems of labor and economic disparities at convenience stores as a unique institution in Japan, and *Time's Journey Through a Room* (2016), which came back to the issues of the earthquake and the dead. Almost all these works became possible with the international joint production creation scheme and were performed both in Japan and abroad.

Okada's name spread beyond Europe in the meantime and there were international joint productions such as *Zero Cost House* (text only, 2012) with Pig Iron Theatre Company (the US) and *God Bless Baseball* (written and directed by Okada, 2015), the first Japan-South Korea joint production for him as the opening program of the Asian Cultural Center (Kwangju/South Korea),

one of the largest cultural complexes in Asia. With *Pratthana – A Portrait of Possession* (composed and directed by Okada, 2018), based on the novel by Thai novelist Uthis Haemamool, his activities in Asia are also expanding. The work was in the Thai language, premiering in Bangkok, and later touring to Paris and Tokyo.

In Germany, where Okada was highly regarded, his collaboration with the Münchner Kammerspiele, a municipal theatre with a long history, has had historical significance. At the beginning, there was a German version of *Hot Pepper, Air Conditioner, and the Farewell Speech*. After that, Okada continued to present the theatre with new work for three consecutive years, including *Nō Theater*



God Bless Baseball (2015) Festival/Tokyo15, Owlspot Theatre ©Usuyama Kikuko

(2017), *No Sex* (2018), and *The Vacuum Cleaner* (2019), all written in German and performed by the theatre's ensemble actors. The last work, which focuses on the problems of *hikikomori* and aging, is currently invited to Berlin's Theatertreffen. This is a prestigious festival held in Berlin every year, at which only ten productions from more than 400 works in German-speaking regions are selected to be presented each season (scheduled for May 2020). This is indeed a historical achievement.

In contrast to Okada's exceptional achievements overseas, many of the performing arts in the Japanese-speaking world have, over the past 10 years, become inward-looking, parochial and self-evident. Younger artists are very conscious of the issues Japan,



Hot Pepper, Air Conditioner, and the Farewell Speech (2016)
Münchner Kammerspiele, Kammer2 ©Julian Baumann



The Vacuum Cleaner (2019-2020) Münchner Kammerspiele, Kammer1 ©Julian Baumann

as their immediate living environment, is facing: an ever-lasting economic recession, a declining birth rate and an aging population. These are so overwhelming for them that it is unthinkable and even unethical to go beyond the national and/or geopolitical borders for the global and the universal. There is a strong tendency among artists working in Japan to start from their immediacy, their very small locality. This locality is sometime misunderstood as “resistance” not “retrogression.” However, this sometimes leads to a series of critical thinking practice as theatre which may lead to the spheres of the universal, where a serious analytical view of locality at a very close distance is the key. This is what Okada did with *Five days in March*. That is why, in the next ten years that have already begun, though it may sound paradoxical, we must keep paying closer attention to the practitioners whose actions wage

very limited local “warfare” and resistance.

Reference

* <https://www.wonderlands.jp/archives/12201/>

Uchino, Tadashi

Uchino received his Ph.D. in Performance Studies from the University of Tokyo (2002). He was a professor at the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at the U. of Tokyo and is currently a professor at Gakushuin Women's College. Uchino's major writings include: *The Melodramatic Revenge* (1996), *From Melodrama to Performance* (2001), *Crucible Bodies* (2009) and *The Location of J Theatre* (2016).

(Translation: Uchino Tadashi)

SPECIAL FEATURE
'Theatre Born in Conflict Zones 11'





Liberian Girl (from the left) Kane Suzuki, Kawabe Kunihiro, Nagatomi Chiaki, Isoda Mie, Okuda Ippei, Yoshino Yoshiko

Special Feature

‘Theatre Born in Conflict Zones’ A Girl’s Struggle Reflect Our Current World —The Dramatic Reading of *Liberian Girl*

Hamada Motoko

During wartime and conflicts, it is not just the soldiers fighting on battlefields who become victims. Needless to say, wars and conflicts should never happen but once they start, civilians also become victims. Sexual violence toward women is a serious problem not only during times of peace but also in times of war. It is said that sexual assaults on women first drew attention during the war in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

In 2018, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to a doctor from the Democratic Republic of Congo, who had fought against sexual violence in conflict, and also to a human-rights activist, who came back alive after being sexually abused by the soldiers of the Islamic

State (IS). They were chosen for their efforts to end the use of sexual violence against women as a weapon of war and armed conflict, which showed the strong resolution of the international society.

Adding fiction, the horrifying realities of violence and injustice that go unchecked and punished in conflicted countries are depicted in Diana Nneka Atuona's immersive play *Liberian Girl* (2013), set during the First Civil War in Liberia (1989-1996). Translated by up-and-coming Odashima Soshi and directed by Inaba Kae of the theatre company Bungakuza, it was presented as a reading performance. The play with anguished cries of various people around the fourteen-year old girl Martha scattered here and



(from the left) Nagatomi Chiaki and Isoda Mie

there had a strong impact. It was also the first play written by the Nigerian writer born in the UK.

Some people might not be familiar with Liberia. The media often covers the Middle East as a conflicted zone but African countries are seldom mentioned.

Liberia was founded in the nineteenth century by slaves who were freed and had returned from the US. The country name comes from the English word “liberty” referring to “freedom” that the former slaves had achieved themselves. However, the confrontation between the indigenous tribes and the American Liberians called “Americo-Liberians”, who are descendants of the freed slaves, created a complicated situation and in 1980, soldiers from local tribes launched a military coup. The civil war began when the American-Liberian Charles Taylor rose up against them and this is the backdrop of the play.

During the civil war that continued on and off for fourteen years since 1980, over 200,000 people were killed and a million people became evacuees and refugees. Moreover, 15,000 children fought with weapons as child soldiers and there were over 40,000 cases of sexual violence toward women.

The set for the reading only had chairs lined up in a row. The actors of Bungakuza wearing black clothes hummed as they

entered the stage and started talking. As they spoke each word with articulate diction and changed the tone of delivery, clear images were formed in our minds, taking the audience to wartime Liberia. The skills of the actors of Bungakuza, known as a theatre company placing importance on “text”, worked well for the reading.

The web of confrontation in Liberia’s civil war was very complex. During the time of the story, the Mano ethnic group, which the character Martha (played by Isoda Mie) belongs to, is cracked down by the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor, although they used to join forces. Martha soon has to go to ‘Sande Bush’ in order to go through a rite of passage into adulthood but she does not want to give up going to school despite the wish of her grandmother Mamie Esther (Yoshino Yoshiko).

The conversation between the grandmother and granddaughter is interrupted when their friend Amos (Kawabe Kunihiro) comes along and tells them that the rebels are coming. The situation women face during civil war is summarized in Amos’s words, “How many stories have we already heard



Yoshino Yoshiko



Kawabe Kunihiro



Kane Suzuki



Okuda Ippei

about the evil things the rebels, all sides, have been doing to our young daughters, eh?”

Martha dresses up as a boy to prevent being raped and heads toward Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, with her grandmother but when they reach the checkpoint, they are stopped by NPFL’s child soldiers named Killer (Kane Suzuki) and Double Trouble (Okuda Ippei) and are separated from each other. Ironically, Martha is mistaken for a boy and recruited as a child soldier. The wheel of fortune starts to spin and the story unfolds around Martha, now called “Jack”, surging with scenes full of tension.

The cruel and insane characters of Killer and Double Trouble, who could rape women or commit murder at any time, were depicted very vividly. They made us feel

uncomfortable not only because of their behaviour but because the translator Odashima chose words spoken by today's young people, which made their dialogue sound very realistic. Suzuki and Okuda delivered the lines dynamically and made the characters even more powerful and real.

Martha has no idea what they would do to her when they find out that she is a girl. In order to survive, she has to behave like them. However, another girl named Finda (Nagatomi Chiaki) is brought along by force and ironically becomes yet another timebomb for Martha.

If it was just an accusation of “war crimes”, a docudrama would be all that was needed. But the author Atuona, in her well-crafted debut work, questions violence and sexuality through the wavering identity of Martha, who disguises herself as a boy and is feeling as though she is walking across a minefield. The scene in which Killer prompted Martha to rape Finda is symbolic. Woman's status is described in lurid detail from woman's standpoint.

In another scene, the apparition of the grandmother Esther appears and criticizes Martha for turning into a child soldier. Martha's pang of conscience and conflict are reflected in a skillful way, adding depth to the story. Isoda delicately expressed how Martha's feelings had changed and made the audience feel empathy for her.

The play ends with a glimpse of hope. The story about civil war in a distant country resonated deeply inside the Japanese audience's heart, perhaps because Martha symbolizes not only the people suffering from war but also the people who are oppressed by tyranny and discrimination. The boys, high on drugs given to them and filled with hatred toward the enemy instilled by the adults during military training, are also victims of the distorted world.

It also raises the question whether people can kill others in the name of war in order to protect themselves. Or whether we can maintain our humanity no matter what the situation may be. The play asks cutting and universal questions.

Before the reading started, Michael Jackson's *Liberian Girl* (recorded in the album *BAD*) was played in the venue. The title of the play comes from this song and in the emotional love song, he sings, "You came and you changed my world". The world does not change that easily. However, it will not change unless you really want to change it.

As a related project, a public talk was held before the reading performances of *Liberian Girl*. The title was "Contemporary Theatre in Israel—Looking at Motti Lerner's *The Murder of Isaac*" and Professor Murai Hanayo of the Faculty of Arts and Letters at Kyoritsu Women's University (specializing in Theories of Western Theatre and Israeli Theatre Studies) was invited to give a lecture.

Since the nation was founded in 1948, Israel has been in conflict with Palestine.

The Murder of Isaac (premiered in 1999 at the Municipal Theatre of Heilbronn, Germany) is a play about the assassination of then Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 by a far-right Jewish fundamentalist. In 1993, peace negotiations between Palestine and Israel were under way following the historic Oslo Accords but the death of Rabin set back the peace efforts. *The Murder of Isaac* has a double structure of a play within a play. Inmates in a state-run PTSD rehab centre for the Israeli Defense Forces try to get to the bottom of Rabin's assassination by putting on their own play.

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Professor Murai explained about the origin and development of Israeli theatre culture in order to introduce the background of *The Murder of Isaac*. Theatre culture developed in Israel after the founding of the nation, getting through a series of wars, and it was also interesting to learn that theatre served as means to underpin the country's existence. In addition, after the activities of Oded Kotler in the 1970s, public theatres have been seeking commercial success since the late 1980s. The professor also reported that plays dealing with Palestine had been excluded from the Acco (Acre) Theatre Festival in recent years, which is a worrying situation.

When President Trump relocated the US Embassy to Jerusalem,

he clearly showed that he was in favour of Israel, and since then, we have no clue as to whether Israel and Palestine will reach a peace agreement. To add to it, there is growing tension between the US and Iran since the beginning of 2020, and the situation in the Middle East remains unpredictable.

The Murder of Isaac deals with a sensitive issue that came as a big shock to the Israelis. Therefore, it has not been presented in Israel yet although it was performed in the US and Germany. *The Murder of Isaac* will be introduced to Japan at the 'Theatre Born in Conflict Zones 12' scheduled in December 2020 and the reading performances will surely become a rare and precious opportunity to present the play for a live audience. In theatre, contradictions and absurdities in the world that are not conveyed through news coverage can be brought to light through individuals. This kind of approach is only possible through theatre and it is something to look forward to.

Hamada, Motoko

She joined The Mainichi Newspapers in 1989. After working in the Arts and Culture Department of Osaka Head Office, she moved to the Arts and Culture Department of Tokyo Head Office. She is in charge of contemporary theatre and entertainment. Besides writing dramatic reviews, she currently contributes articles for 'Hibikore kangeki' carried in the evening paper's arts and culture corner and also web articles for 'Butai juo tokidoki naname'. She studied at Rothberg International School at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem from 1995 to 1996.

(Translation: Sumida Michiyo)

Photographs taken by: Ishizawa Chieko (including the photograph on p185)

About the 'Theatre Born in Conflict Zone' series

The centres of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) around the world have carried out projects called 'Theatre Born in Conflict Zones' as an attempt to build peace through theatre. The Japan Centre of ITI embarked on the 'Theatre Born in Conflict Zones' project in 2009 as part of the study and research for the publication of Theatre Yearbook. The series has continued for eleven years and twenty-six prominent plays not yet known in Japan have been introduced through translation, reading performances, lectures given by the authors, etc. The plays have been published from the third year of the series. If you wish to get hold of the booklet carrying the translation of *Liberian Girl*, please contact the Japan Centre of ITI.

'Theatre Born in Conflict Zones 11'

<<Reading>>

December 13-15, 2019 at Atelier West, Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre

Title: Liberian Girl

Written by Diana Nneka Atuona

Translated by Odashima Soshi

Directed by Inaba Kae (Bungakuza)

Cast: Isoda Mie, Yoshino Yoshiko, Nagatomi Chiaki, Kane Suzuki, Okuda Ippei,
Kawabe Kunihiro and Yokota Eiji (voice only)

*All of them are members of Bungakuza.

Post-performance Talks

Moderator: Seki Tomoko

December 14: Inaba Kae, Odashima Soshi

December 15: Inaba Kae, Odashima Soshi, Okano Hideyuki (specially
appointed lecturer of the Faculty of Applied Sociology at Kindai
University/ researcher in the fields of cultural anthropology,
armed conflict and civil war)

Lecture

December 12, 2019 in Room 1204 of the Main Building at the Ikebukuro
Campus of Rikkyo University

Theme: "Contemporary Theatre in Israel—Looking at Motti Lerner's *The
Murder of Isaac*"

Lecturer: Professor Murai Hanayo of the Faculty of Arts and Letters at Kyoritsu
Women's University (Theories of Western Theatre and Israeli Theatre
Studies)

Interviewer: Otani Kenjiro (stage director/ leader of 'company ma')

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Companion Volume ‘Theatre Abroad 2020’ (Japanese)

These articles do not appear in
‘Theatre in Japan 2020’.

World Theatre Day Message by Shahid Nadeem

Theatre in Asia and Africa

China	The Potential of Peking Opera	Tamura Yoko
South Korea	Interests in Debate and Process-Based Theatre	Lee Seong-Kon
Laos	Dynamism Born from the Fusion of the Traditional and the Contemporary	Olé Khamchanla
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South Africa	The Significance of Popular Theatre	Kusunose Keiko
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Israel	At a Crossroads, Seventy Years on From Israel's Founding	Murai Hanayo

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- USA** An Overview of the State of the Performing Arts in New York and America— Shioya Yoko
- Brazil** Brazilian Theatre and the Impact of the New Government's Policies — Maria Fernanda Bomero
- New Zealand** At the Intersection of Culture: Performing Arts by Maori, Pacific Islander Migrants, and Asian Migrants — Kosugi Sei

Theatre in Europe

- UK** The Principles and Reality of the European Family — Motohashi Tetsuya
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- France** A Lingering Disquiet: The Trigger for the Future? — Fujii Shintaro
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- Macedonia** I Am Not Wild Flesh, Theatre Is No Twig in the Wind — Ivanka Apostolova Baskar
- Russia** Year of Theatre 2019: The Enduring Power of Theatre — Shinozaki Naoya

Developments in Japan and Overseas

Round-Table Discussion: Performing Arts Across Borders

—Looking Back on International Exchange during the Thirty Years of the Heisei Era

Sato Maimi, Miyagi Satoshi and Nakamura Akane (Moderator: Date Natsume)

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Morocco
Niger
Nigeria
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Sierra Leone
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Zimbabwe

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Belgium(Wallonia)
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Cyprus
Czech Rep.
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The list of ITI Centres is updated as needed on the ITI website below.

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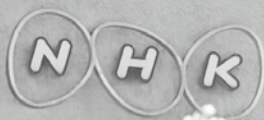
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夢と感動のステージへ…

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tpam.or.jp

A REAL THEATER OF THE PEOPLE BY THE PEOPLE FOR THE PEOPLE in TOKYO :

TOMIN GEKIJO

WHAT MAKES UP A THEATER?

Playhouses, performers and the audience. But what is indispensable?
TOMIN GEKIJO thinks that people are.

TOMIN GEKIJO has no playhouse or troupe of actors, but does possess a permanent audience, the number of its members amounting to about 20 thousand today.

EACH HAS HIS OWN TASTE

TOMIN GEKIJO organizes 4 series: THEATER, KABUKI, SHINGEKI and MUSIC. Their programs are selected by project committees composed of well known specialists and representatives among the members. Particularly in the theater series, members can choose among about 50 different plays a year according to their own tastes.

TOO EXPENSIVE OR NOT, THAT IS THE QUESTION

Once having paid membership fee, which costs 1000 Yen for an individual member, members can enjoy many programs with season tickets discounted 40 or 50%.

HEAVEN CREATES A MAN NEITHER ABOVE NOR UNDER A MAN

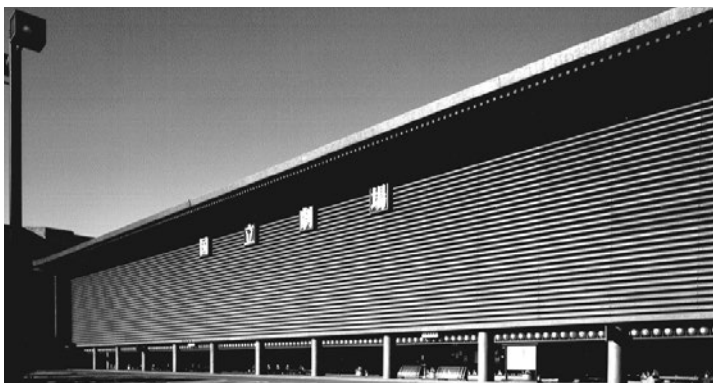
said an ancient opinion leader Yukichi FUKUZAWA. TOMIN GEKIJO has succeeded in keeping this principal by establishing an audience system which consists in distributing booked seats by a rotation system.

WHAT DOES TOMIN GEKIJO MEAN?

TOMIN means a citizen of Tokyo and GEKIJO a theater. Under the generous support of the Tokyo Government and the Japan Theater Promoters Guild, it also makes possible "Theater going at half-price" for Tokyoites.

TOMIN GEKIJO, a new audience organization, aims at an open theater and actively seeks contacts with foreign theaters.

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