

国際演劇年鑑 2021

Theatre Yearbook 2021

Theatre in Japan

日本の舞台芸術を知る

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

公益社団法人 国際演劇協会日本センター
ITI / UNESCO

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*Theatre
Yearbook
2021*

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Theatre Yearbook 2021 Theatre in Japan

Published in March 2021

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Commissioned by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan in fiscal 2020
under the Program for Nurturing Upcoming Artists Leading the Next Generation

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Printed in Japan

Foreword

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

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

While COVID-19 has dealt a major blow to the whole world over the last year, the internet has served as a window onto the limitless ingenuity demonstrated by each country in taking on the challenge of engaging in performing arts activities under these circumstances. Artists and audiences alike across the globe remain keen to participate in the arts. Creation and appreciation of theatrical and dance performances encourage us to think about people and society by sharing time and space together. The contribution made to our lives by the performing arts seems unlikely to change.

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

Also funded by this program, we have staged readings every year since 2009 to introduce remarkable plays from around the world as part of our research activities to promote international theatrical exchange. In 2020, we continued the “Theatre Born in Conflict Zones” series for the twelfth consecutive year, this time featuring a new play from Israel that was translated and introduced to Japan for the first time.

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

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

March 27, 2021

In commemoration of World Theatre Day

Nagai Taeko
President

Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute

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«Editors' Notes»

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

舞臺芸術
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**Shots from the Performing Arts in Japan
in 2020**

Noh and Kyogen



Shibuya-Noh First Night: Kanze School *Youchi Soga (The Soga Brothers' Night Raid)* Photo: Tsujii Seiichiro



The 41st Wadachi no Kai **Fujito** Photo: Tsujii Seiichiro



Noh Performance 2020 **Sagi (Egret)** Nomura Shiro © The Nohgaku Performers' Association

Noh and Kyogen



Noh Performance 2020 ***Tsukimi zato (Autumn Moon and the Blind Man)*** Yamamoto Tojiro
© The Nohgaku Performers' Association

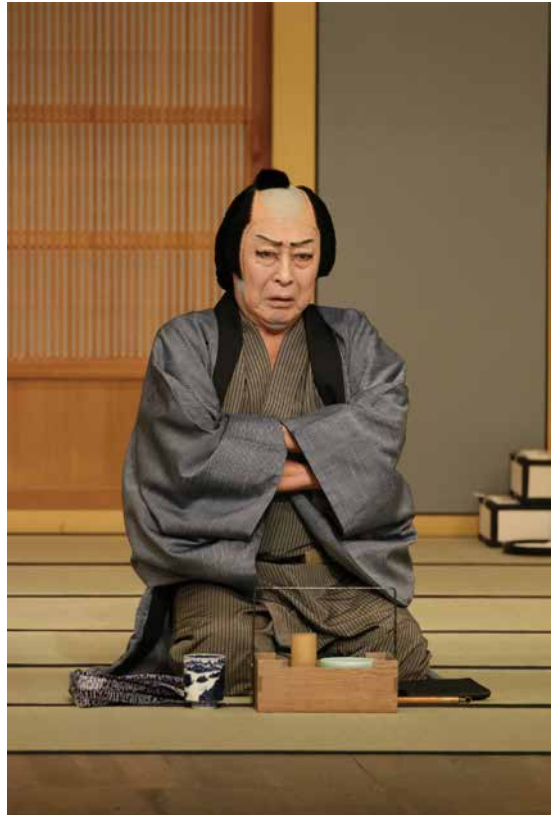


Noh Performance 2020 ***Kawakami*** Nomura Man (right), Nomura Akihito (left) © The Nohgaku Performers' Association

Kabuki



Zoom Kabuki *Chushingura*
(*The Treasury of 47 Loyal Retainers*)
Matsumoto Koshiro as Oboshi Yuranosuke
© Shochiku



Sakanaya Sogoro (Sogoro, the Fishmonger)
Onoe Kikugoro as Sogoro
Photo provided by the National Theatre

Kabuki



Shunkan Nakamura Kichiemon as Shunkan Photo provided by the National Theatre



Kajiwara Heizo homare no ishikiri (Stone-Cutting Kajiwara) Kataoka Nizaemon as Kajiwara © Shochiku

Kabuki



Yoshitsune senbon zakura
(Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees)
Onoe Kikunosuke as the magical fox Tadanobu
Photo provided by the National Theatre



Sakata Tojuro as Ohatsu in *Sonezaki shinju*
(The Love Suicides at Sonezaki)
June 2015, Hakataza
© Shochiku

Bunraku



Honcho nijushiko (The Japanese Twenty-Four Examples of Filial Piety) Kiritake Kanjuro as Princess Yaegaki
© National Bunraku Theatre and Ningyo joruri Bunraku-za



Keisei hangonko (The Courtesan and the Resurrecting Incense) Takemoto Shikorodayu (left), Takezawa Sosuke (right)
© National Bunraku Theatre and Ningyo joruri Bunraku-za

Bunraku



The 23rd Bunraku Sujoruri no Kai *Shoutsushi Asagao banashi (The Tale of the Morning Glory)*
Toyotake Sakitayu, Tsuruzawa Enza © National Bunraku Theatre and Ningyo joruri Bunraku-za



Ehon taikoki (A Picture Book of the Taiko Toyotomi Hideyoshi) – Amagasaki Photo provided by the National Theatre



Parco Theater Opening Series **Mitani Bunraku: Sorenari shinju** (*Much Ado about Love Suicides*)

Photo: Osako Futoshi, provided by Parco Theater



The 40th World Heritage Theater – Tomioka Silk Mill **Koimusume tsumugi no rabirinsu** (*Girl in Love and the Labyrinth of Silk*)
BUNRAKU-beyond, Ningyo Joruri and Hatsune Miku © SEGA/CFM

Musicals



Whistle in the Wind Photo provided by Toho Theatrical Division



Once Upon a Time in America Takarazuka Revue—Snow Troupe, based on the motion picture *Once Upon a Time in America*, courtesy of New Regency Productions, Inc., and the novel *The Hood* written by Harry Grey © Takarazuka Revue Company



A Robot in the Garden Shiki Theater Company Photo: Abe Akihito



Shakespeare in the 12th Year of the Tempo Era Photo provided by Toho Theatrical Division

Musicals



Violet Umeda Arts Theatre Photo: Hanai Tomoko



Billy Elliot TBS/Horipro/Umeda Arts Theatre/WOWOW Photo: Tanaka Aki

Contemporary Theatre



Parco Theater Opening Series **Actors** (Social Distancing Version) dir. Mitani Koki
Photo: Abe Akihito, provided by Parco Co., Ltd.



Ghosts from the Performance of "Regret of Ghosts and Monsters — Zaha" dir. Okada Toshiki (Kanagawa Arts Theatre)

Contemporary Theatre



A Midsummer Night's Dream dir. Silviu Purcărete (Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre) Photo: Tanaka Aki



Furimun Sisters dir. Matsuo Suzuki (Theatre Cocoon) Photo: Hosono Shinji

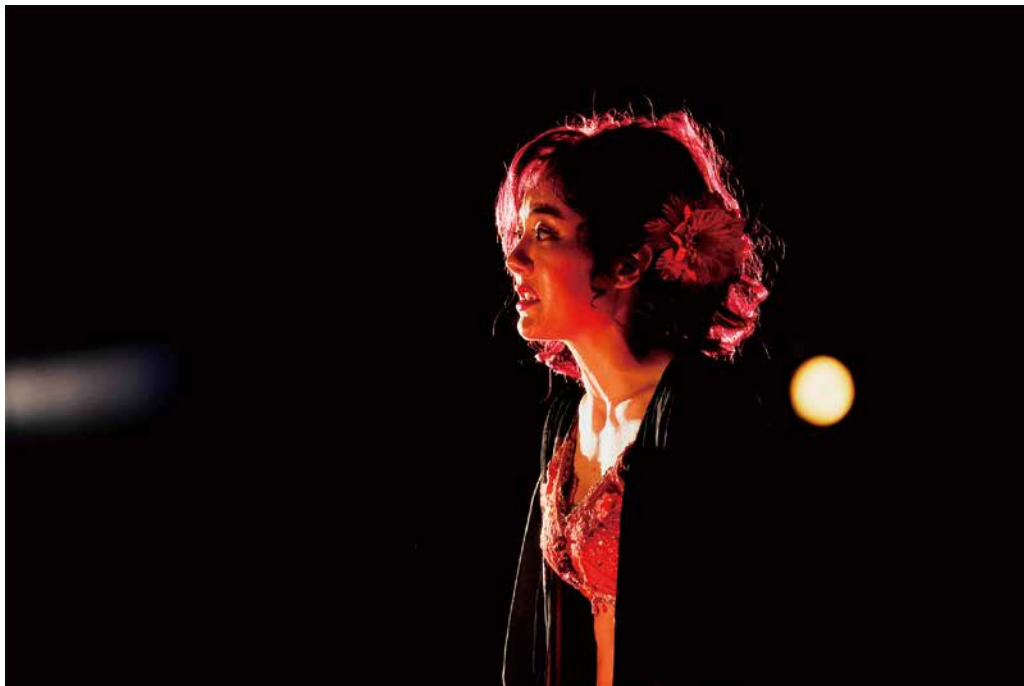
You Must Go, Laura
dir. Watanabe Eri (Honda Theater)
Photo: Yokota Atsushi



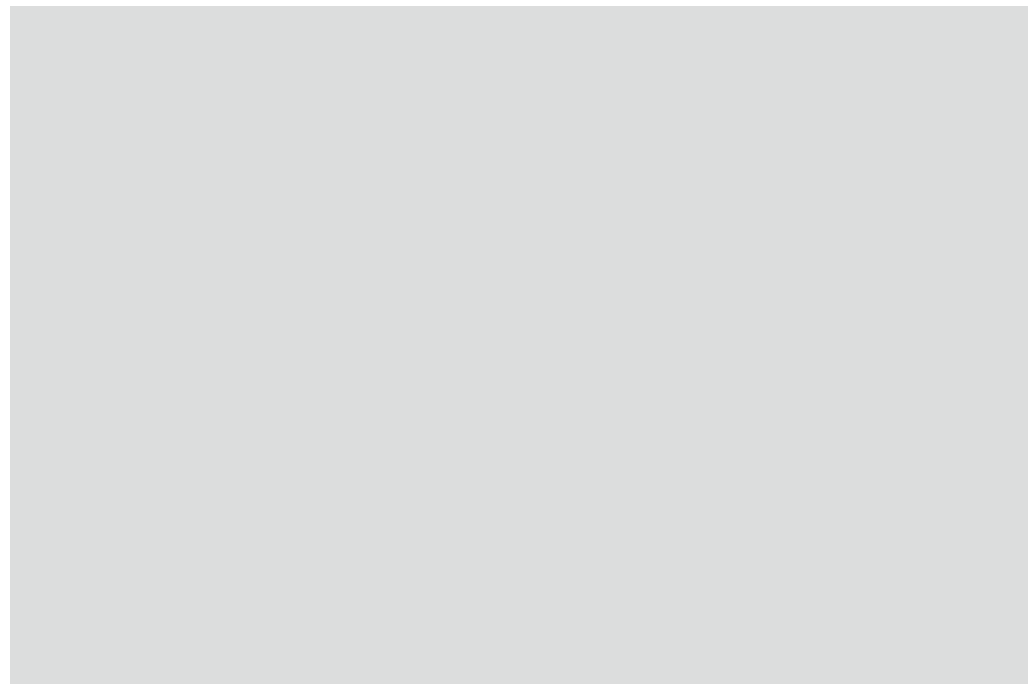
The Bacchae—Holstein Milk Cows
dir. Ichihara Satoko (Kanagawa Arts Theatre)
Photo: Sato Shun



Contemporary Theatre



Murderous Intent Striptease dir. Kuriyama Tamiya (Theatre Tram) Photo: Hosono Shinji



Richard II dir. Uyama Hitoshi (New National Theatre, Tokyo) Photo: Hikiji Nobuhiko



Mary Stuart dir. Mori Shintaro (Setagaya Public Theatre) Photo: Hosono Shinji



Mrs. Klein dir. Kamimura Satoshi (Theater Fuusikaden) Photo: Oki Miho

Children's and Youth Theatre



Change: From the Recesses of the Library Kazenoko Theatre Company Photo provided by Kazenoko Theatre Company



Night on the Galactic Railroad La Clarté Puppet Troupe Photo provided by La Clarté Puppet Troupe



A Christmas Carol Mochinosha Puppet Company Photo provided by Mochinosha Puppet Company



The Happy Foundling Puppet Theatre Hitomi-za Photo provided by Puppet Theatre Hitomi-za

Children's and Youth Theatre



Can You Whistle, Johanna? Tokyo Engeki Ensemble Photo: Matsuura Noriko



Our Elementary School Is a Space Station Theatre Urinko Photo: Hattori Yoshiyasu

Japanese Classical Dance



Kakurenbo (Hide and Seek)

Yamamura Wakayuko

Photo provided by the National Theatre



Magakami (The God of Misfortune)

Fujima Ranko

Photo: Seto Hidemi

Japanese Classical Dance



Yoshiwara suzume
(The Sparrows of the Yoshiwara Pleasure Quarters)

Fujima Etsuko

Photo provided by the Nihonbuyo Association



Kanawa (The Iron Crown) Inoue Yachiyo

Photo provided by the National Theatre

Ballet



Sleeping Beauty Asami Maki Ballet Tokyo Photo: Shikama Takashi



Fiorito Tani Momoko Ballet Photo: Staff Tes

Ballet



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



Ryuuguu – The Turtle Princess National Ballet of Japan Photo: Shikama Takashi



M The Tokyo Ballet
Photo: Hasegawa Kiyonori



Giselle Sumina Okada Ballet School Photo provided by Sumina Okada Ballet School

Contemporary Dance and Butoh



Mukumeku-mu Seki Kaori's Punctumun Photo: Matsumoto Kazuyuki



Yokohama Dance Collection 2020 *Suiyoubaiou* Yokoyama Ayano Photo: Sugawara Kota



Night on the Galactic Railway Teshigawara Saburo Photo: Abe Akihito



Wherever the World Company Derashinera Photo: Suzuki Jouji

Contemporary Dance and Butoh



Diagram of a Fully Automatic Kleshas-Brain Yasumoto Masako Photo provided by ph



A Gathering for a Duet Kasai Akira's Duo no Kai, Kasai Mitsutake (left), Kawaguchi Takao (right) Photo: bozzo



Le Petit Prince Kanagawa Arts Theatre/Moriyama Kaiji Photo: Maiko Miyagawa



Gold Experience Iwabuchi Teita's Body Map Photo: Maezawa Hideto

Contemporary Dance and Butoh



Geigeki Dance *Yo! Don Quixote* Tanaka Min Photo: Hirama Itaru



Dance New Air 2020→21 *nowhere* Yuasa Ema and Ohira Takayuki Photo: Yulia Skogoreva

舞臺芸術
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The Japanese Performing Arts
in 2020

Noh and Kyogen

That Which Changes, That Which Does Not

Oda Sachiko

From Restraints to Reopening

In revisiting the year 2020 in Noh and Kyogen, it is impossible to ignore the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic. Focusing on the National Noh Theatre, let us summarize the timeline from the initial restraints on performances to their reopening. At the government's request on February 26, to mitigate the spread of infection, the Japan Arts Council decided on February 29 to cancel performances at the National Theatre, Engei Hall, Noh Theatre, and Bunraku Theatre. Meanwhile, various other Noh theatres and organizations continued to some extent, such as the Kanze-kai Regular Performance, the Otsuki Seiin-kai Tokyo Special Performance, the Tessen-kai Regular Performance, and the Umewaka-kai Special Performance, yet many of the events scheduled for March were cancelled or postponed. According to a survey by the editorial department of the monthly *Nohgaku Times*, there were 70 cancellations and 35 postponements in the period up to March 19; 88 cancellations and 104 postponements up to April 20; and 51 cancellations and 42 postponements leading up to May 20. Some performances were broadcast online.

After the April 7 Emergency Declaration was lifted on May 25,

starting with performances in July, the National Noh Theatre would reduce its seating capacity to 50% according to official guidelines, while applying infection prevention measures. Though not uniformly, other Noh theatres and groups would gradually reopen from June through July, continuing with performances and returning to almost 100% from October through November, following the September 19 relaxation of restrictions on seating capacity.

As explained above, a considerable number of performances scheduled from March onwards were canceled or postponed. Some groups postponed all of their regular performances for the year, while others were forced to cancel despite having continued their preparations until the very day before. Amid the uncertainty, there were numerous instances of sudden cancellation notices and calls for refunds. Since resuming, the overall number of performances has been greater than usual, with both prescheduled and rescheduled events. Despite anxieties due to the sudden increase in infections during December, the performances continued more or less as planned, without seeing any major decline in audience numbers.

How did Noh and Kyogen respond to these unforeseen circumstances? What was brought to light about Noh and Kyogen, and what is it that will change, or not change? While it is probably still too soon to be able to adequately develop such a discussion, in revisiting 2020's performances, I would like to share what stood out.

Masked *Jiutai*

The first thing I saw at the National Noh Theatre after the reopening was the “41st Wadachi no Kai” featuring Honda Mitsuhiro and

Sakurama Kinki of the Konparu school (July 5). What struck me was the different appearance of the *jiutai* chorus, who wore pale yellow face masks onstage, and were reduced from the customary eight members in two rows to six members in one and a half rows. Their masks are said to have been inspired by the white masks worn by the *seino* dedicants at the Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri festival. It cannot be denied that this infection prevention measure tended to have a muffling effect on their voices, with a decrease in volume. Elsewhere, we would later see black masks, screens placed in front of the *jiutai*, and variations in the number and layout of performers, with some wearing masks and others not, depending on the particular school's approach. In some cases, it would be noticeable at the outset that the performance was taking place with certain adjustments, such as immediate stage exits—of the *wakitsure* attendant after delivering their introductory line, or the *tsure* attendant (heavenly maiden) after completing a dance—while actors faced each other from staggered positions, or space was made between *hayashikata* musicians. If such features become normalized, this may in time bring about a qualitative change to Noh itself.

Noh and Kyogen as Prayer

A major event of the year was “Noh Performance 2020: Praying for the End of the New Coronavirus,” a ten-day run from July 27 to August 7 (excluding August 1 and 2) at the National Noh Theatre, co-sponsored by the Nohgaku Performers' Association, Japan Nohgaku Organization, Agency for Cultural Affairs, and Japan

Arts Council. Originally, this event was to be the “Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Noh Festival” whose planning began in 2014 as “a symbolic cultural event to run in parallel to the Games” (from a pamphlet for the event). From the opening day performance of the ritual *Okina* by Kanze Kiyokazu (head of the Kanze school) to the closing day performance of *Dojoji* (*Dojoji Temple*) by Hosho Kazufusa (head of the Hosho school) there was a total of 35 items of Noh, Kyogen, *maibayashi* (abbreviated performances in *hakama*-style), and *shimai* (short highlights accompanied by *jiutai* only), assembling great masters, elders, and leaders from each of the schools and groups. Though it is said that the program did not depart greatly from the original plan, still, it was regrettable that infection countermeasures necessitated cuts to characters and verses at every turn, as well as the 50% limit on audience numbers. Nonetheless, the realization of this program, which felt like a gathering of the sum forces of the Noh-Kyogen world, left an impression of the resilience of these art forms. It is an indication of that strength that they can respond to such a change in framing, from a grand festival to a prayer for relief from the virus, while their form remains unchanged. Along with its social role as a performing art set apart from other forms of theatre, I was once again reminded of some of the reasons for Noh’s longevity for more than 670 years.

Among the many fulfilling performances, one I would like to mention for the deep impression it made in light of the “prayer” theme is the *maibayashi Sagi* (*Egret*) danced by Nomura Shiro (July 31). Here an egret allows itself to be captured by order of the Emperor, only to fly away upon receiving permission to dance. The

portrayal of the egret requires a special kind of footwork not seen in any other work, making this a rare and significant experience. Nomura, looking trim in grey *hakama* with silver fan in hand, was born in 1936. Despite the perhaps inevitable loss of physical agility, still he uses the strength of his core to stand firmly on one leg, and gives his all to the dance. In this figure, spreading wide its wings to fly for freedom, there was a natural expression of both the distress in which humanity finds itself, and its liberation from that state. It was a dance imbued with deep prayer from one of the elders of the Noh world.

Riches in Kyogen

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In recent years there has been a noticeable vitality in Kyogen. In addition to the evolving artistry of three Living National Treasures, it is heartening to see that promising successors are emerging among veterans, mid-career, and early-career performers in each school.

Bringing together young Kyogen performers from across the country and from different styles and schools, the “6th Kyogen Contest: 8 Rounds Starring Taro Kaja” (February 15, National Noh Theatre) facilitated in turns by Okura Yataro and Nomura Matasaburo, was a new project showcasing eight numbers featuring the highly popular Noh character of Taro Kaja (the head apprentice). The various guises of the hardworking, opportunistic, and sly Taro Kaja were vividly portrayed, and creativity was seen in the programming of the rarely performed piece *Naginata Ashirai* (*Counter Parry*) and *Mizu Kikazu* (*The Unseeing and Unhearing*), which features characters with disabilities.

There was a succession of young performers taking on challenging works, marking their arrival at higher stages of artistic maturity. The “Nomura Man 90th Birthday Commemoration: Yoroze Kyogen New Year Special Performance” featured three grandsons of Man (sons of Nomura Manzo): Mannojo in *Tsurigitsune* (*Fox Trapping*), Kennosuke in *Sanbaso* (*Celebratory Dance*), and Shinnosuke in *Nasu no Yoichi no Katari* (*The Tale of Nasu no Yoichi*). Mannojo made a vivid impression with his high-leaping, larger-than-life physicality. Nomura Yuki (grandson of Mansaku, son of Mansai) appeared in two formats, solo in *Nasu no Yoichi no Katari*, and in the *ai-kyogen* (interlude) of *Yashima* at the “61st Kyogen Gozaru-no-za” (August 10, 12, and 30, Hosho Noh Theatre). He recited calmly with a well-projected voice and consideration for the overall balance.

At the “Mansaku no Kai Special Performance: Viewing *Tsurigitsune*,” Nomura Mansaku’s pupils Naito Ren (October 20) and Nakamura Shuichi (November 5) each took on *Tsurigitsune* (National Noh Theatre). While there is still room for growth there, it is pleasing to see these young performers earnestly developing their craft, which bodes well for the future.

Elsewhere, the “Yamamoto Noritoshi 77th Birthday Commemoration” was performed without an in-person audience and broadcast live on August 31, featuring Noritoshi himself, recipient of the previous year’s 41st Kanze Hisao Memorial Hosei University Noh Theatre Award, in his tenth and truly youthful performance of *Tsurigitsune*, while his grandson Norimitsu made his debut with *Iroha* (*The Language Lesson*). In each *Tsurigitsune*, the performer in

the Hunter role must be commended for their solid support of the *shite* protagonist.

It should be added that Zenchiku Tomitaro of the Okura school, who appeared in the aforementioned “Kyogen Contest,” passed away on April 30th at the young age of 40 due to the novel coronavirus.

New Acting Trends

Two performances from “Noh Performance 2020” that made me keenly aware of how much a work can be transformed by its production were *Tsukimi Zato* (*Autumn Moon and the Blind Man*, July 31) and *Kawakami* (August 4). Both are short on comedic elements but esteemed as great works depicting human psychology. As such, the mainstream tendency had been to perform them in a slow, weighty manner, but here there was a sketch-like quality to their performance, honing in on a sense of humanity.

The blind man in *Tsukimi Zato* was played by Yamamoto Tojiro, with Yamamoto Noritoshi as the man from Kamigyo (upper Kyoto), played in an unforced style. Parting on good terms, having shared a drink, the upper-Kyoto man then pretends to be someone else and assaults the blind man, dragging him around and pushing him to the ground. This transformation in the man renders this a problematic scene, yet Noritoshi was able to present the action without introducing any psychological excess, while Tojiro too acted with a minimum of emotional attachment.

Kawakami sees Nomura Man as the blind husband, whose wife is played by Nomura Akihito, whose unique qualities have

been prominent in recent years. The husband has his sight cured by Jizo Bodhisattva on the condition that he gets a divorce, yet when his wife insists on staying together, he complies with her. Nomura Man allowed such wide ups and downs to develop precisely, with strength of voice and restraint in acting. In the final scene where the husband, once again blind, is practically dragged by the hand offstage by his wife, Man paused for a moment on the bridgeway, turning his body slightly towards the audience. Regret and resignation moved through that silent figure, representing a complex tale that does not resolve in simple marital affection.

The common thread between *Tsukimi Zato* and *Kawakami* was how the audience's imagination was aroused by a dispassionate style of acting, the opposite of a passionate, demonstrative style. In both cases, where the blind man falls over, the actor actually falls over. With the abandoning of sweetness and excess, and the arising in their place of uncompromising reality and dry humor, one senses a new direction in Kyogen.

As an illustration of new trends in Noh, I would like to mention "Shibuya Noh" at Cerulean Tower Noh Theatre, which began the previous year, and this year presented *Youchi Soga* (*The Soga Brothers' Night Raid*, October 28). A special feature this year is *hitamen*: maskless performance. This could have been challenging considering the abundance these days of *mugen-noh* (pieces with supernatural or otherworldly elements).

Youchi Soga depicts events before and after the vengeance of Soga no Juro (*tsure*: Katayama Kuroemon) and Soga no Goro (*shite*: Kanze Atsuo). Katayama's acting shone, achieving subtle

expressivity of the eyes, with assuredness of dialogue. This series of four scheduled performances remains incomplete due to postponement, yet I sensed here continuity from previous *hitamen* performances—which have come into vogue before—and a contribution towards breaking new ground in acting.

Sakurama Kinki Portrays Deep Despair

My top pick of the year was the acting of Sakurama Kinki, who played the *shite* in *Fujito* at “Wadachi no Kai.” During the Battle of Fujito (1184), as told in *The Tale of the Heike* (Vol. 10), Minamoto no Yoritomo’s vassal Sasaki Moritsuna (*waki* counterpart) is handsomely rewarded for leading a successful vanguard across the channel, having learned the location of a stream there from a local fisherman whom he had killed out of fear he would be given away. The Noh picks up these events where the *Heike* leaves off. In the fisherman’s mother (*mae-shite*), a new character is introduced who publicly denounces Moritsuna’s senseless act. The climax of the first act comes where the mother, having heard her son’s fate, gets up and presses towards his killer: “Let me be killed just like my child!” Being shoved aside, she rolls on the ground, exclaiming: “Give back my child!” Since olden times, many great performances have risen to this scene, calling on the actor’s ingenuity in portraying the lamentation and violent emotion of the elderly mother. She is beside herself as she rushes forward, in this tense confrontation of the powerful by a common person. The *waki* role of Moritsuna is also difficult.

Surprisingly, Kinki’s performance places the focus not on this

moment, but a later one. With “Give back my child...” it is as though the inward intensity is ratcheted up two gears—having stood still in confrontation of the *waki*, he sits down. But after that, standing back up at the urging of a servant (*ai*, played by Miyake Chikanari), the *shite*’s facial expression is now vacant, without focus. He exits the stage, disappearing off the bridgeway, hunched somewhat smaller than before. The *ai* follows after, offering comforting words, yet there is an unnaturally wide space between them, and the hand of support is extended in vain. The elderly mother just walks, an empty shell, having exhausted her strength. The silently disappearing figure was an eloquent expression of *Fujito*’s theme, of the common person’s resistance against the powerful.

Kinki’s deep expression of despair had also been seen a year earlier at the Yokohama Noh Theatre, in the final scene of *Kinuta* (*The Fulling Block*). As soon as the deceased wife (*shite*) has reproached her husband (*waki*): “Know my pain? Oh, you are painful!” she realizes her feelings will never reach her husband. It was as though a chasm had opened up between them. It is difficult to explain how such an impression arises, and it may be due to one’s own imagination. But it may be said that the audience’s various imaginations are born from the silence, where words and acting cease; where the *shite*’s mind and body are transfigured, just after such an outburst of emotion has been expressed. Kinki’s acting stands out in its expressions of despair and loneliness. Each time one encounters it, one trembles in recognition that the human heart is not so easily pacified.

Lastly

From March 2020, Noh and Kyogen went online. This has taken various forms, from live broadcasts minus live audience, to YouTube broadcasts of archived performances, to Zoom webinars. In contrast to previous times where straight archival filming was the norm, there is now an increase in active camerawork, and the advantages of being able to reach overseas and rural locations have become more apparent. Online broadcasts will surely continue into the future. While the situation has greatly changed, so far this does not seem have brought about a major qualitative change to the content of Noh and Kyogen. With no equipment onstage, the advantage lies in being able to put on a full performance for any time or location, with just a single rehearsal. It seems important to be grateful for this, while continuing to cultivate these works and deepen in their expression.

Oda, Sachiko

Researcher of Noh and Kyogen. Doctor of Letters. Graduate of Hosei University Graduate School of Humanities. Primary research themes include the history of Noh and Kyogen directing, and Noh and Kyogen works themselves. Active at the intersection of research and the stage, including performance criticism, lecturing, commentary, and as a dramaturge for revivals and historical performances.

(Translation: Lingua Guild)

Canceled Performances and Reopening Theatres During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Yanai Kenji

One after Another, Performances Are Temporarily Stopped, Canceled and Postponed

For kabuki, as with all other genres of live performance, this was a year of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Starting at the end of February, the national government and municipal bodies called for voluntary restraints on going out and organizing events, and from March on, different theatres partially canceled performances. After that, detailed specifications were issued for different stages of closing and reopening of theatres and other public venues, with criteria for each stage, but nevertheless, all kabuki performances in March were canceled. At the end of March, it was announced that the April performances would be canceled as well, and right after that, on April 7, the national government announced a State of Emergency. After that, performances of kabuki—not only in the big cities, but regional tours—had what must be described as the first long-term cancellation in modern times. The Kabukiza Theatre had scheduled a three-month event beginning in May for the name-taking ceremony of Ichikawa

Ebizo to become Ichikawa Danjuro Hakuen XIII, but even this event had to be postponed indefinitely.

Even after the ending of the formal State of Emergency, kabuki only resumed five months later with a month-long production in August featuring young performers at the Kabukiza Theatre. The National Theatre also began performances in August, but that was with two recitals only lasting a few days in the small hall, featuring graduates of their training programs. This was the *Chigyo no kai* (*Minnow Recital*) / *Kabuki kai* (*Kabuki Recital*) joint performance of kabuki plays and the *Ne no kai* (*Music Recital*) featuring kabuki music. Performances of kabuki in the large hall did not begin again until the beginning of its regularly scheduled season with a month-long production in October, although it was divided into two different short programs instead of the usual single, long program.

Resuming Performances with Measures to Combat the Pandemic

The pandemic brought on two big changes.

The first was a change in the structure of programs and the theatrical environment.

For example, at the Kabukiza Theatre, when it resumed performances in August, the programs were structured so as to reduce the time that people spent in the theatre, and at the same time, in order to reduce the number of performers, there were four different programs centering on dances, with the entire program calculated to last around one hour. Both the cast of performers and the stage staff were different for each of the four programs. The number of

seats that could be used was drastically reduced, and in addition to such measures as taking the temperature of the audience members as they entered and requiring that they sanitize their hands, eating and drinking in the theatre were prohibited. In order to increase ventilation, the doors to the auditorium were kept open even during the performance. The musicians and stage assistants on stage also wore black cloths, like veils, to cover their mouths and noses. Also, instead of selling programs, there were simple explanatory pamphlets that were distributed for free, and the traditional shouts to praise the actors were forbidden. Performances only resumed after these very cautious measures were put into place.

After that, other theatres performing kabuki resumed, taking similar measures and keeping an eye on the state of COVID-19 transmission. But at the end of November, one actor contracted the virus, and because other actors had close contacts with him, there had to be several sudden cast changes. As of this writing in December 2020, performing kabuki live still feels like walking on thin ice.

In January 2021, Kabukiza is scheduled to change from four short programs to three different programs with two plays each. The National Theatre will reduce the length of the program and is scheduled to have a repeat performance of *Shitenno oedo no kaburaya* (*The Four Lieutenants of Demon-Quelling Raiko and the Miraculous Arrows of Edo*), an Edo period play that was first revived at the National Theatre in 2011. Performances of kabuki are also scheduled at the Shinbashi Enbujo in Tokyo in January, Hakataza in February, and at the Minamiza in Kyoto in March,

so theatres are gradually beginning to have regular performances of kabuki again, but no one has any idea when things can return to normal.

Starting Online Distribution on a Serious Scale

Another phenomenon of the pandemic period was distributing recordings of performances online.

When the live productions of kabuki in March were canceled, it was at the very end of the short rehearsal period of kabuki and just before opening day. The productions were ready to go, and most of the production costs had already been incurred, but with no way of presenting them to a paying audience. So, Kabukiza, the National Theatre, and Minamiza in Kyoto all recorded the productions in their theatres without an audience and uploaded them for free on the Internet for a limited time. Kabukiza uploaded *Hina matsuuri* (*The Doll's Festival*), *Shin usuyuki monogatari* (*The New Tale of Princess Usuyuki*), *Kajiwara Heizo homare no ishikiri* (*Stone-Cutting Kajiwara*), *Takatsuki* (*The Ceremonial Cake Stand*), and *Numazu* (*At the Numazu Post Town*), the National Theatre uploaded a full-length performance of *Yoshitsune senbon zakura* (*Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees*), divided into three programs, and Minamiza uploaded *Super Kabuki II: Shinpan Oguri* (*Super Kabuki Second: A New Version of the Story of Oguri Hangan*). From time to time, these performances in empty theatres had a forlorn feel to them, but these performances that otherwise couldn't be seen were well edited, beautifully clear, and surprisingly satisfying. In August, there was the beginning of an official

Internet distribution service, Kabuki On-Demand, so kabuki finally joined the ranks of providers of paid video content.

This was a response to the pandemic, but now that there are almost no broadcasts of performances of kabuki on regular television, shouldn't we see online distribution of kabuki as a good way for potential kabuki audiences who live outside the cities with kabuki theatres or who for various reasons don't actually buy tickets for performances, to enjoy and become familiar with kabuki?

Also, there was a unique experiment using the online conferencing application Zoom called *Zoom Kabuki* with a production of *Chushingura* (*The Treasury of 47 Loyal Retainers*) (June and July, 5 parts). Here, "Zoom" is written with Chinese characters that mean "dream image." The concept and staging were by Matsumoto Koshiro, and there were many experiments only possible with a recorded production. For example, in the prologue where the villain Ko no Moronao (Koshiro) tries to seduce Kaoyo Gozen (Nakamura Kazutaro), the wife of Enya Hangan, the man who will eventually be forced to commit ritual suicide, Moronao and Kaoyo Gozen were filmed separately and combined with editing. Or in Act III, where Moronao relentlessly bullies Enya Hangan driving him to attack Moronao, the scene was given great immediacy by showing Moronao very close up, from Enya Hangan's point of view.

In May, the Nihon Haiyu Kyokai (Japan Actors' Association) teamed up with the Dento Kabuki Hozonkai (OPK: The Organization for the Preservation of Kabuki) to establish a YouTube channel, *Kabuki-masho* (*Let's Kabuki!*). This features videos of kabuki actors talking about acting and behind-the-scenes features

of kabuki to make a positive effort to broadcast information about kabuki other than actual performances in order to inspire interest in kabuki.

Fine Performances

This was a year with few performances and constant battles with unprecedented procedures, but this had the one happy result that there were many examples of veteran performers displaying the best of their mature art.

Onoe Kikugoro appeared in several plays, showcasing his dazzling pacing, able to change instantly from slow and leisurely to fast and powerful. In January, he appeared at the National Theatre in what has become a New Year's tradition of a revival of an old play, reworked for modern audiences with *Kiku ichiza reiwa no adauchi* (*The Kikugoro Theater Troupe and a Revenge Play for the Reiwa Period*). Then there were two performances that featured his mastery of portraying the common people of the Edo period. In February at the Kabukiza, he appeared as the poor but gallant wall-plasterer Chobei in *Ninjo Banashi Bunshichi Mottoi* (*A Story of Human Feeling: Bunshichi and the Invention of Bunshichi Topknot Ties*) and in October at the National Theatre he appeared as Sogoro in *Sakanaya Sogoro* (*Sogoro, the Fishmonger*).

The March performance featured a balanced ensemble of top senior actors in *Shin usuyuki monogatari*, with Nakamura Kichiemon as Saisaki Iga-no-kami, Kataoka Nizaemon as Sonobe Hyoe, Nakamura Baigyoku as Katsuragi Minbu, and Nakamura Kaishun as Ume-no-kata. It was unfortunate that such a fine

performance could not have been seen live and was only shown on the Internet. Kichiemon and Nizaemon both played samurai torn between their duty and love for their children, but expressed it in different ways. The contrast in the acting styles of the two actors showed splendidly, with Kichiemon coldly formal and Nizaemon affable and warm.

In November at the National Theatre, Nakamura Kichiemon gave a masterful performance in *Shunkan* as a monk in exile on an island. His performance in this play has long been renowned, but the complex movement of emotion inside the character was both subtle and extremely clear. This time, he emphasized the very human figure of a man who has renounced all the things of this world. I felt that Kichiemon's acting had reached a new stage of excellence.

At Kabukiza, Kataoka Nizaemon appeared as Kanshojo in the *Domyoji (Domyoji Temple)* scene of *Sugawara denju tenarai kagami (Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy)* in February and as Kajiwaru in *Ishikiri Kajiwaru* in October and as Rokusuke in *Keyamura (Keyamura Village)* at the National Theatre in November, all plays originally from the puppet theatre. Nizaemon simultaneously showed some of the unique ways of performing these roles in his family's acting style, but at the same time that they showed the transmission of a unique tradition, they also very vividly portrayed living human beings.

Bando Tamasaburo had performances at Kabukiza called *Special Performance: Recorded Image plus Classical Japanese Dance* with *Sagi Musume (The Heron Maiden)* in September and *Yokihi*

(*Yang Guifei*), a modern dance based on the noh play about the famous beauty of Tang China who almost destroyed the realm, in October. After a stage announcement in which Tamasaburo introduced the pieces to the audience, video was used to show the backstage world and later to interlay images of past performances with the live performance. The result was full of variety and indeed, was a very satisfying one-man show.

In January at Kabukiza, Matsumoto Hakuo appeared as Gotobei in *Goto Sanbaso (The Sword Ornament-Maker Gotobei)* and in March as Heisaku in *Numazu*. In both roles, he left a strong impression with his unique, humorous touch.

And here are some of the memorable performances by the younger generation of mature performers:

First is *Iromoyo chotto karimame (The Ghost Story of Kasane)* in September at Kabukiza, with Matsumoto Koshiro as Yoemon and Ichikawa Ennosuke as Kasane. This was a full-on collision of acting skills by two actors who are still young and energetic. This was a dance thick with the feeling of kabuki.

Sannin Kichisa (Three Thieves Named Kichisa) in December at the National Theatre featured the delicately balanced trio of Nakamura Tokizo as Ojo Kichisa, Nakamura Shikan as Osho Kichisa, and Onoe Shoroku as Obo Kichisa. The acting of each was careful and precise and brought this story of people caught up in the travails of karma and fate very vividly.

In *Iwashi uri koi no hikiami (The Sardine Seller and the Nets of Love)* in January at Kabukiza, Nakamura Kankuro as Saru Genji and his brother Nakamura Shichinosuke as Hotarubi showed that

they had not only properly received the tradition of this play with a deep connection to their family, but that they had also made it their own. In *Keisei hangonko* (*Stuttering Matahei*) in December, Kankuro as Matahei and Ennosuke as his wife Otoku both gave performances making good use of their innate pleasant and cheerful personalities.

In March at the National Theatre, Onoe Kikunosuke was scheduled to play the three most important roles in *Yoshitsune senbon zakura*: Taira no Tomomori, Igami no Gonta, and the magical fox Tadanobu. Unfortunately, this did not receive a live performance, but watching the video online showed that it was a very impressive achievement. After this performance, an exhausted Kikunosuke said, “It would be totally different with an audience...” This impressed on me anew that theatre is an operation that is impossible without the raw give-and-take between the stage and the audience. This year, Kikunosuke also made his first appearance as Yohei in the *Hikimado* (*Skylight*) scene of *Futatsu chocho kuruwa nikki* (*Two Butterflies in the Pleasure Quarters*). Expectations for how Kikunosuke will both receive the art of kabuki and build on it are growing constantly.

Obituaries

On November 12, Sakata Tojuro IV died. His acting was always young and alluring, and he worked tirelessly for the preservation and advancement of Kamigata kabuki (the distinctive style from Kyoto and Osaka). He appeared in the experimental kabuki of Takechi Tetsuji and appeared in Toho Kabuki, but his appearance

as the courtesan Ohatsu in *Sonezaki shinju* (*The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*) became a media sensation. As a sign of his devotion to Kamigata kabuki, he revived the name of Sakata Tojuro, the founder of this style of acting, for the first time in 231 years. In particular, after he took the name of his father to become Nakamura Ganjiro III, his acting as the gentle, attractive men of plays from the puppet theatre about Osaka commoners like Jihei in *Shinju Ten no Amijima* (*The Love Suicides at Ten no Amijima*) and Chubei in *Koibikiyaku Yamato Orai* (*The Courier from Hell*) deserves praise.

Also, on September 24, Onoe Kikujuro died. He was an important supporting actor who played working people of the Edo period in unique trades and conveying the atmosphere of their work and that vanished world, as with the peddler of *katsuo* bonito fish in *Kamiyui Shinza* (*Shinza, the Barber*) and the attendant in the public bath in *Kurayami no Ushimatsu* (*The Dark World of Ushimatsu*). Kikujuro was also a fight choreographer responsible for staging the fight scenes for which the Kikugoro Theater Troupe is famous.

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(Translation: Mark Oshima)

Bunraku

Bunraku in the Age of COVID-19

Kameoka Noriko

For the world of Bunraku puppet theatre, 2020 will probably remain in both the historical records and people's memories as a year that was upended by COVID-19. In January and February, the productions of Bunraku went as usual. But for six months, starting in March, there was the unusual situation where all forms of live entertainment became impossible. Bunraku was no exception. This was a year of anxiety, when it was impossible for anyone to see what the future would bring.

January 2020 opened the new year colorfully with a gala production at the National Bunraku Theatre in Osaka celebrating veteran narrator Takemoto Tsukomadayu taking the new name of Takemoto Shikorodayu VI. Shikorodayu V (1876–1940) was an extremely famous narrator who was active from the Meiji Period (1868–1912) to the early Showa Period (1926–1989) and made several recordings. This was the first revival of this name in eighty years. At the press conference announcing the name-taking, the new Shikorodayu said that he “wished to polish his art in way worthy of the name in order to leave this name for future generations.” And, just as he said, I felt that his artistry showed new scale with his performance of the *Tosa Shogen Kankyo* (*Tosa Shogen's*

Hermitage) scene of *Keisei Hangan* (*The Courtesan and the Resurrecting Incense*). Together with shamisen player Takezawa Sosuke, he narrated the story of the artist Matahei, who is prevented from receiving an official artistic name from his teacher because of a terrible stutter. In this scene, Matahei's artistic power and the love of his wife bring a miracle. The stage announcement of his new name was made by Toyotake Rodayu on the *yuka*, the little platform by the side of the stage where the musicians perform and he illustrated Shikorodayu's extremely straightforward and enthusiastic nature with a humorous story from his early training.

Shikorodayu and Rodayu are both veteran narrators in their seventies, and together, they are the group just junior in age and rank to Living National Treasure Toyotake Sakitayu. Rodayu took his name in 2017, and since that time, his artistry as seen in performances in *jidaimono* period plays and other genres has grown in scale. I hope that for both of them, taking a new, major artistic name will be the impetus for new heights of achievement.

The absence of up-and-coming narrator Toyotake Rosetayu from the January performances for health reasons was a cause for some concern. He was scheduled to narrate the role of Iwafuji in the *Zori uchi* (*Beating with the Slipper*) scene of *Kagamiyama kokyo no nishiki-e* (*Mirror Mountain: A Women's Treasury of Loyalty/Female Chushingura*). Sometimes, instead of a single narrator performing all the roles and describing the scene, there is an alternate performance style called *kake-ai*, with one narrator for each role. For the January performances, in place of Rosetayu, the young promising narrator Toyotake Yasutayu appeared and gave a very

solid and delightful performance. Yasutayu was paired with shamisen player Nozawa Kinshi. In recent performances, this pairing has been common, which is probably a major reason for Yasutayu's significant progress. Rosetayu returned to the stage in the September performances of Bunraku in Tokyo.

In 2019, Bunraku featured a performance of all of the acts of *Kanadehon Chushingura* (*The Treasury of Forty-Seven Loyal Retainers*) (including infrequently performed sections) divided over the entire year, so it was interesting that 2020 began with a performance of *Kagamiyama kokyo no nishiki-e*, a play that is often described as the female version of *Chushingura*. It was a very satisfying performance with a full selection of the top puppeteers, with Yoshida Kazuo as the main puppeteer for Onoe, Yoshida Tamao as the main puppeteer for Iwafuji, and Kiritake Kanjuro as the main puppeteer for Ohatsu.

The February performance of Bunraku at the small hall of the National Theatre in Tokyo repeated the announcement of the new Shikorodayu with the same play as in Osaka, *Keisei hangonko*, and the shamisen player was again Sosuke. Reflecting on this production now, I realize how lucky we were to be able to complete this run. The program also featured two popular plays, the entire third act of *Sugawara denju tenarai kagami* (*Sugawara and the Secrets of Calligraphy*) and the *Nozakimura* (*Nozaki Village*) scene of *Shinpan utazaimon* (*A New Version of the Story of Osome and Hisamatsu*).

Two days after the end of the February performances of Bunraku, on February 26, the government issued a request that cultural and sports events with large gatherings of people be

voluntarily canceled or postponed. As a result, Bunraku's regional tour scheduled for March was canceled, and then, the regularly scheduled performances of Bunraku: April in Osaka, May in Tokyo, June and July in Osaka, and August in Tokyo were all canceled. The performances of Bunraku in August in the old Uchikoza theatre in Ehime Prefecture, which have become a regular event, were also canceled. This was true, of course, not only for Bunraku; after March, all performances of kabuki, noh, kyogen, and traditional Japanese music and dance disappeared. Frankly, at the start of all this, few people imagined that this period of self-restraint would go on for so long.

During this time, there was also some very sad news. Living National Treasure Toyotake Shimatayu died of kidney failure on August 20 at the age of eighty-eight. He delighted audiences with his deeply emotional narrative style with a very wide range, going from such *sewamono* domestic plays as the *Sakaya* (*Sake Shop*) scene of *Hade sugata onna Maiginu* (*The Fabulous Appearance of the Female Dancer*) and *Shinju ten no amijima* (*The Love Suicide at Ten no Amijima*) to *jidaimono* period pieces and even including new Bunraku plays like *Meoto zenzai* (*Hooray for Marriage!*) and *Uriko-Hime to Amanjaku* (*Princess Uriko and the Amanjaku goblin*). He was designated a Living National Treasure in 2015, but he retired from the stage the following year. For many years, he had been an instructor in the training program for the Bunraku troupe organized by the Japanese Arts Council, and even after his retirement, he continued to passionately train his successors as Bunraku narrators. His contribution in teaching many students

and training many narrators must not be forgotten.

Performances resumed at the National Bunraku Theatre in Osaka with *Bunraku sujururi no kai*, a performance of the narrative music without puppets on August 22. The program consisted of three pieces, beginning with the *Yadoya (The Inn)* scene from *Shoutsushi Asagao banashi (The Tale of the Morning Glory)*, with narrator Toyotake Sakitayu and shamisen player Tsuruzawa Enza, and continuing with the *Komakiyama jochu (Inside the Mt. Komaki Fortress)* scene of *Hiyoshimaru wakaki no sakura (Hiyoshimaru and the Young Cherry Blossoms)*, performed by narrator Takemoto Shikorodayu and shamisen player Tsuruzawa Kantaro, and the *Shigenoi kowakare (Shigenoi's Parting from her Son)* scene from *Koi nyobo somewake tazuna (The Beloved Wife and the Colorful Braided Horse Reins)*, performed by narrator Takemoto Chitosedayu and shamisen player Tsuruzawa Seisuke. The narrations by accomplished artists in their prime, veteran artists, and a talented younger shamisen player performing with all their might helped to satisfy the starvation for Bunraku after a long absence. Tickets sold out, but on the day of the performance, there were many empty seats. This is probably because many people who bought tickets were still hesitant to actually go to the theatre.

Before the performance at the National Bunraku Theatre, there was an experiment testing how far saliva droplets from a narrator's mouth as he chanted would go during a performance of Bunraku. The experiment measured this under various conditions, such as having the narrator and shamisen playing on a little platform on the side of the stage. It was found that when a narrator

sang, moisture from his mouth did not go farther than 1 meter away, and it was not found to reach the shamisen player at his side.

On the day of the performance, there were various measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. When entering the theatre, all audience members were required to wear masks, and their temperature was taken. Patrons tore off their ticket stubs themselves and put them in boxes. The front row and the section of seats in front of the musicians' platform were blocked off. The number of seats used was reduced to less than half, and disinfectant was available at the entrance to the auditorium and other places around the theatre. There was one touch that was uniquely Bunraku, even though it was part of the measures to prevent the spread of the virus. To keep people from sitting in adjacent seats, every other seat was covered with paper. But these papers were very attractive and colorful, with designs based on the patterns of the costumes for Bunraku puppets like Shizuka Gozen in *Yoshitsune senbon zakura*. I asked about them and was told that this was the idea of one of the employees of the National Bunraku Theatre. This strong desire by the people of the theatre to reduce the tension and make it possible for the audience to relax and enjoy the performance was both reassuring and heartwarming.

With this performance breaking the ice, the next performance was on August 28 in the small hall of the National Bunraku Theatre with the *Wakate sujoururi no kai*, another concert performance of the narrative music of Bunraku, this time featuring younger performers. The performance featured the *Terakoya* (*The Village School*) scene of *Sugawara denju tenarai kagami* (*Sugawara*

and the Secrets of Calligraphy), performed by narrator Toyotake Yoshihodayu and shamisen player Tsuruzawa Tomonosuke, and the *Kumi uchi* (*The One-on-One Battle*) scene from *Ichinotani futaba gunki* (*A Chronicle of the Battle of Ichinotani*), performed by narrator Takemoto Yasutayu and shamisen player Tsuruzawa Seishiro. The tickets for this performance also sold out quickly.

The first performances with puppets were in Tokyo, with the regular September performance of Bunraku in the small hall of the National Theatre. The previous performances were in February, a hiatus of seven months. Several measures were taken to avoid spreading the virus, including having four short programs with totally different groups of performers to allow time to disinfect the theatre between programs and to try to ensure that only performances of one section would have to be canceled if a member of that section possibly caught the virus. There were also measures to avoid the “Three Cs” (closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings) by ensuring good ventilation and reducing by more than half the number of seats occupied. Nevertheless, the audience welcomed the performers with warm applause. The audience could feel the joy of the performers on stage again in their passionate performances, and that moved the spectators greatly.

However, even though on September 5, the first day of performances, the first program went smoothly, a member of the production had a slight fever. As a result, the second through fourth programs were canceled on the fifth and all performances were canceled on the sixth. The member of the production tested negative with PCR testing, so performances resumed normally on the

seventh. Also, for health reasons unrelated to COVID-19, Toyotake Sakitayu did not appear on the opening day and Toyotake Oritayu went on in his place. Sakitayu appeared beginning September 14 and finished the run. Toyotake Rosetayu had been absent from the stage since November 2019 but appeared again in September and performed the *Amagasaki* scene of *Ehon Taikoki Ehon Taikoki* (*A Picture Book of the Taiko Toyotomi Hideyoshi*, narrating very powerfully with the shamisen of Living National Treasure Tsuruzawa Seiji. The program also included such plays as *Komochi Yamanba* (*The Mountain Hag Becomes Pregnant*) and *Yari no Gonza kasane katabira* (*Gonza, the Lancer*).

In October, there was the usual tour of Japan. The program included the *Gappo sumika* (*Gappo's House*) scene of *Sesshu Gappo ga tsuji* (*Tamate Gozen and Shuntokumaru*) and the *Jusshuko* (*Incense Burning*) and *Okuniwa* (*Inner Garden*) scenes of *Honcho nijushiko* (*The Japanese Twenty-Four Examples of Filial Piety*) and such top-notch performers as musicians Toyotake Rosetayu with Tsuruzawa Seiji, Toyotake Rodayu with Tsuruzawa Seisuke, and puppeteer Kiritake Kanjuro. Even so, there were only six venues, including Sapporo and Kanazawa, a sad result of the pandemic. There were also two days of Bunraku performances at the Hakataza theatre in Fukuoka, Kyushu.

Performances of Bunraku puppet theatre proper in Osaka began with the regularly scheduled Autumn performance at the National Bunraku Theatre which started on October 31. These were the first full performances since January, a hiatus of about nine months. There were three separate programs. The first

program featured the *Yabase, Chikubushima yuran* (*The Pleasure Boat at Chikubu Island*), and *Kurosuke sumika* (*Kurosuke's House*) scenes from *Genpei nunobiki no taki* (*The Nunobiki Cascade and the White Banner of the Genji Clan*). The second program featured the *Nozakimura* (*Nozaki Village*) scene of *Shinpan utazaemon* (*A New Ballad of Osome and Hisamatsu*), and *Tsuri onna* (*Fishing for a Bride*). The third program featured sections of *Honcho nijushiko*, mostly from the fourth act. As in Tokyo, to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the seats in front of the musicians' platform were blocked off, and audience members occupied every other seat.

The production as a whole combined popular plays and colorful plays with very enjoyable scenes to meet the expectations of Bunraku fans. Living National Treasure Yoshida Minosuke, who was appearing on stage for the first time since February, appeared as Osome's mother Okatsu in *Nozakimura*, delighting fans of Bunraku. The masterful performance of Kiritake Kanjuro as the main puppeteer for Princess Yaegaki, the heroine of *Honcho Nijushiko*, was particularly memorable with the beautiful yet very powerful movements only possible with a Bunraku puppet.

In the fall, there were two happy events. Tsuruzawa Seiji was awarded the Bunka Korosha Prize ("person of cultural merit") from the Japanese government, the first Bunraku shamisen player to be so honored, and Yoshida Tamao received the Shijuhosho ("medal with purple ribbon").

As winter began, the pandemic continued, and the number of people infected continuously increased. With this as background, in December, the last regularly scheduled Bunraku performances

of the year were at the small hall of the National Theatre in Tokyo. But on the seventh, it was found that one of the performers had caught the virus, and the second program was immediately canceled that day. This event was another reminder of just how difficult it is to continue with live performances during a pandemic like this.

There were also memorable events and experiments aside from the regular performances of Bunraku. From August 13 to 20, as part of the series to commemorate the opening of the newly refurbished Parco Theater, there was an encore production of the Mitani Bunraku project that was first performed there in 2012, *Sorenari shinju* (*More or Less a Love Suicide*), which in the publicity also had the English title *Much Ado about Love Suicides*. It is very good that a new Bunraku play full of laughter, written and directed by Mitani Koki, one of contemporary theatre's top writers and directors, is gradually becoming an established part of the repertoire. On October 25, there was another event at the Tomioka Silk Mill, a Meiji-era thread-spinning factory that was a significant site of Japan's industrial modernization and has been recently designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The event was a collaboration between the virtual singer Hatsune Miku and Bunraku puppeteer Yoshida Tamasuke. This was not a classical play, but an event aimed at young audiences that can be seen as a good way to provide a first encounter with Bunraku.

Meanwhile, narrators Toyotake Rodayu and Toyotake Todayu have begun using Zoom to teach Gidayu chanting. Some people seem to find it much less threatening than the traditional

one-on-one method of teaching. In the age of the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone is operating by trial and error to see what kinds of live performances are possible and how the art can be taught. I hope that this experience can be used in positive ways to discover new possibilities for the future.

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(Translation: Mark Oshima)

Musicals

What Came Out Instead of a Bumper Crop

Hagio Hitomi

The year 2020 was supposed to be a year for an unprecedented bumper crop in the world of Japan's musical theatre. Musical productions ranging from Japanese premieres of Broadway's hit musicals to revivals performed by popular actors were scheduled throughout the year. Fans were waiting eagerly for those productions to open, but plans were blown off at a stretch because of COVID-19. For a few months after the government imposed a voluntary ban on the nation, the musical scene became silent, like many other fields.

Although many performances were canceled, looking back, the practitioners of musical theatre made quite a good effort. Some productions were shifted to online streaming without live audiences or were changed to concert versions, and in some cases incorporated "social distancing" in the staging; trying to be clever and creative, they kept things going in the world of musicals. Many excellent productions were born from these flexible approaches. Even in the worst situation, those committed to musicals made gestures and showed love for their creations.

Lost Musicals

In April, most of the theatres shut down due to the government's request for voluntary closure, and almost all performances until July and August had to be canceled. Therefore, the audience did not get a chance to see the Japanese premieres of epic musicals such as *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *Newsies*, and *Hairspray*. These were all hit musicals from Broadway and London that were going to be performed in Japanese. The casting was impressive and one could well imagine that it must have taken a few years to book some of the actors.

West Side Story–Season 3 at IHI Stage Around Tokyo, where the auditorium revolves 360 degrees, was among the epic musicals that got canceled. *Season 1* and *Season 2* that had already been presented in the previous year, but the musical fans were waiting for *Season 3* because of the casting. The revivals of Toho's hit musicals such as *Elizabeth* and *Miss Saigon* had stirred up an even bigger sense of anticipation in the audience because of the fresh casting.

Going back a bit further in time, the COVID-19 pandemic had already begun to influence some theatres and companies around mid-February. Some productions were suspended and then resumed but were suspended again. There were other shows that opened later than scheduled but were suspended straight away. These kinds of confusions continued to increase. Takarazuka Revue Company's Tokyo leg of *ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA* was a typical case. A week after it opened, performances were suspended, and even after they resumed, it was suspended again after playing for three more days—although they

eventually managed to present the final performance.

It was an original production based on a gangster film written and directed by Sergio Leone, and it was adapted into a musical by the company's director Koike Shuichiro. While following the storyline of the original film, Koike skillfully reshaped it around a love story, which is typical of Takarazuka's shows. The lead actress Nozomi Futo's performance left a strong impression.

The opening of *The Little Shop of Horrors* was also delayed, and then the show was canceled for a few days after it opened. The musical itself had been revived several times, but this time it was a new production directed by Ueda Ikko. The lead character was double-cast, namely, Suzuki Hiroki and Miura Hiroki, and for this reason, it attracted attention. While the show ran for a few days, I was lucky enough to get to see both casts, who are talented young musical actors carrying the future of Japanese musicals.

Anastasia, a Broadway musical, and *Whistle Down the Wind*, a musical that started off in London, also met the same end, and both productions had bad luck. *Whistle Down the Wind* was scheduled to run for about a month in Tokyo and then go on tour, but it was suspended after running for only eight days. To make things worse, and much to our sorrow, Miura Haruma, who played the lead, passed away a few months later.

Miura drew attention in the world of musicals when he starred in the Japanese premiere of *Kinky Boots* (2016), beautifully playing the part of the drag queen Lola. When it was revived in 2019, his Lola had become even more appealing. Miura's next challenge in musical theatre was to play the part of a runaway

convict in *Whistle Down the Wind*, an Andrew Lloyd Webber musical. He contained his feelings and sang with a clear voice to fully express the subtle nuances of the character, which was completely different from Lola. He was no doubt the first runner in Japan's musical theatre scene. In my personal opinion, he was the closest, among young Japanese musical actors, to succeeding at a Broadway-class level.

Original Musicals Made with Great Efforts

Recently, original musicals have gradually increased their presence in the world of musicals. *Soap Bubbles Flew, They Flew to the Universe* (*Shabondama tonda Sora made tonda*), which was presented at the very beginning of the year at Theatre Creation, was originally premiered by Ongakuza in 1988. Since then, it has been presented throughout the years as a signature musical for the company. Toho acquired the rights, and it was performed by Inoue Yoshio and other actors who regularly perform in Toho's musicals. I heard that the main actors in the show were fascinated by the musical and asked Toho to produce it. The production proved that appealing original musicals could come to stay and carry on to the next generation.

Shiki Theatre Company's original musical *A Robot in the Garden* was of great significance. Because of COVID-19, it was postponed and opened in October. Shiki made a big gesture and did a very good job, given the fact that *Frozen*, another of Shiki's feature musicals that was initially planned to open at around the same time, was postponed to 2021. Moreover, unlike *Frozen*, which

is a replica (a production that follows the original staging and designs), *A Robot in the Garden* was a brand-new musical made from scratch.

Shiki has already produced original musicals as the “Showa Trilogy (Showa Sanbusaku)” (*Li Hsiang-lan (Ri Koran)*, *Foreign Hill (Ikoku no oka)*, and *Southern Cross (Minami jujisei)*), as well as family musicals. The major difference from Shiki’s previous original musicals was that for *A Robot in the Garden*, most of the creative staff members were outsourced. The original novel by the British writer Deborah Install was adapted into a musical play by Osada Ikue and staged by Koyama Yuna. You can say that it was the first production in which Shiki crossed the border of a theatre company and opened a new dimension in their approach. Although there was room for refinement, on the whole it was an enjoyable production full of inventive ideas, such as using a puppet to portray the robot.

I would like to mention another original epic musical, which is *FURIMUN Sisters*, written and directed by Matsuo Suzuki (premiered at Theatre Cocoon in November). Matsuo Suzuki had already been commissioned by the Theatre to write and direct *Beautiful – A Woman’s Rendezvous with God (Kirei – Kamisama to machiawase shita onna)*, so it was, so to speak, the second round. There are three characters who are smoldering in the corners of a city: a convenience-store clerk (played by Nagasawa Masami), an actress (Akiyama Natsuko) who has not performed for ten years, and a gay man (Abe Sadawo) who used to work as a drinking companion at a host club. In the story, they form a bond and lash back.

A drama full of critical spirit was vividly portrayed by the attractive actors.

Young Talent in Action

From around July, the practitioners in the world of musicals tentatively started to find ways to get through the pandemic. Hakuhinkan Gekijo was one of the first theatres to reopen with *BLUE RAIN*, which was originally a Korean musical based on Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ogita Koichi wrote the script for the Japanese adaptation and also directed it. Acrylic sheets to prevent aerosol infection were used in the set to express the distances between the characters, which was an idea that came out of COVID-19.

“TOHO MUSICAL LAB,” presented at Theatre Creation in July, was also an interesting attempt. Two newly written one-hour musicals were performed and livestreamed with no audience: *Happily Ever After* (written and directed by Nemoto Shuko) and *CALL* (lyrics, book, and staging by Miura Naoyuki). Both productions were interesting, but above all, the paean to theatre in *CALL* was compelling.

From September on, the musical scene suddenly became very active again. Chris Bailey, who was going to direct and choreograph the Broadway musical *How to Succeed Business Without Really Trying*, starring Masuda Takahisa of Johnny & Associates, could not come to Japan. However, they managed to create the show through online communication and the efforts of Ogita Koichi, who worked as the associate director.

The Producers, which is another Broadway musical adapted into Japanese starring Inoue Yoshio, was directed by Fukuda Yuichi. The production followed Suzan Stroman's original choreography. They communicated remotely with the international staff, but since the musical had been presented a few times in Japan, there were members in the company who could teach the choreography, which helped the creation process to run quite smoothly.

The London musical *Flashdance* premiered in Japan in September. The creative staff were Japanese; it was directed by Kishitani Goro (he also worked on the Japanese script and lyrics) and choreographed by Omura Shunsuke (SHUN) and JUN. Manaki Reika starred in the show. It was the first time for her to lead the company as the single-cast principal after she left Takarazuka Revue Company, and her dance was magnificent.

The works of talented young creators also stood out this year; notably Fujita Shuntaro, who directed *Shakespeare in the 12th Year of the Tenpo Era* (*Tenpo 12-nen no Shakespeare*) (February), *Jersey Boys* (July), *VIOLET* (September), and *NINE* (November). Many directors' shows got canceled or suspended amid the pandemic, but all of Fujita's productions were presented in front of an audience as scheduled, although *Jersey Boys* was turned into a concert version and *VIOLET* was performed only five times for three days, half a year later than scheduled. Good luck must have been on his side after all. It is often said that "luck is also one of your skills" but in Fujita's case, it was not his only skill, because his productions were indeed of high quality.

Shakespeare in the 12th Year of the Tenpo Era was originally a

play written by Inoue Hisashi, and it has been directed by Ninagawa Yukio and other directors before. In this version, the focus was placed on the protagonist Sado no Miyoji (played by Takahashi Issei), who hurtles through life feeling angry about social inequalities. Fujita's direction had an edge as he had captured the problems of today's society. As for *VIOLET*, it initially premiered in London in 2019, and Fujita worked on the production, collaborating with London's local staff and cast. The Japanese version followed the concept of the London production. The story is about a heroine, who has a scar on her face, traveling around the American South on a bus during the 1960s. After experiencing racial discrimination and other realities of the world, the heroine, who has been filled with rage, frees herself. The heroine was double cast and played by Yuga and Yuzuki Fuka. I was overwhelmed when I heard Yuga sing the blues.

It was the fourth time that *NINE* was presented in Japan. The musical is about a film director (played by Shirota Yu) who has fallen into a slump. The drama depicts how he struggles through life, distressed about his creative work and his relationships with women. Using a set (designed by Matsui Rumi) that looked like a coliseum and the staging that took into account the eyes of the people watching from outside, such as through the live camera, the audience were given an objective view of the foolish and yet endearing nature of human beings, and it was turned into a brilliant human comedy.

Harada Ryo, who is of the same generation as Fujita, also showed his skills in Takrazuka's *A Farce in Pigalle* (*Pigaru*

kyosokyoku). His sophisticated choice of adapting Shakespeare's Twelfth Night into a romantic comedy set in Paris during the Belle Époque period and being able to make the large cast smoothly move around the stage showed that he already has his own unique way of looking at the world. For Takarazuka Revue, Ueda Kumiko, who is yet another director of the same generation, wrote and directed *FLYING SAPA*. Her bold idea was intriguing.

Fujita, Harada, and Ueda Ikko, whom I have just mentioned, and Ueda Kumiko are around forty years old. The same goes for Osada Ikue, who wrote the script for *A Robot in the Garden*, and Koyama Yuna, who directed it. The creators of this generation are doing particularly very well. By the way, *Ryogoku Fancy Sumo Wrestlers (Ryogoku oshare rikishi)* (December), which was initially not categorized as a musical but eventually turned out to be a musical-like production, was also created by producers who are forty years old. They usually work for Toho, Meijiza, and Village, and produce different types of works. Through this musical, the three producers crossed borders and worked hand in hand to launch their "Three Musketeers Project." The activities of young creators and the trend of crossing borders are likely to boost Japan's musical theatre.

Lastly, I would like to touch upon *Billy Elliot* (opened in September), in which children, who are the youngest of the younger generation, are the stars. Needless to say, it is a wonderful musical and it premiered in Japan in 2017. Initially, people thought that it was going to be difficult to produce a Japanese version, as they had to follow Stephen Daldry's original staging and boys

whose voice had not yet broken were required to play the lead. Horipro lead the Japanese premiere of *Billy Elliot* to success and was going to take on the challenge to revive it yet again, but was directly affected by COVID-19. The foreign staff could not come to Japan, the rehearsals were fraught with restrictions, and the biggest worry was about the children appearing in the production. Working under these unfavorable conditions spoiled their start, but they postponed the opening for a couple of months and finally managed to put the production onstage.

It was not only *Billy Elliot*. In 2020, the worlds of musicals and spoken theatre were sustained by the creators' and audiences' love for theatre and enthusiasm. It was a year in which I was reminded of the underlying strength of Japan's musical theatre.

Hagio, Hitomi

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(Translation: Sumida Michiyo)

The Coronavirus Closed the Theatres. But the Curtain Rises Again.

Yamaguchi Hiroko

“Before March” and “after July.” With the spread of novel coronavirus infections in Japan, the theatre world was completely changed after a three-month break.

Following the prime minister’s February 26 request for organizers not to hold events for two weeks, national and public theatres as well as major entertainment companies one after the other canceled performances of their productions. With disarray and confusion rife, many organizations nonetheless decided to go ahead with performances. But when the State of Emergency was declared on April 7, all performances were suspended.

While people were asked to show self-restraint by not holding performances, no compensation was offered. People began to search for ways to survive. Various crowdfunding campaigns were set up, including the Mirai Performing Arts Fund and Arts United Fund, while the Japan Independent and Private Theatre Association was founded, and the #WeNeedCulture campaign launched alongside film and music industry peers with the aim of establishing a public recovery fund. The Japan Performing Arts Solidarity Network includes over two hundred corporations,

theatre companies, and public theatres, including large companies like Toho, Shochiku, HoriPro, and Shiki Theatre Company, as well as small and medium-size companies. New kinds of solidarity emerged from collecting and sharing information, carrying out fact-finding surveys, drawing up guidelines for restarting performances, offering advice on aid proposals, supporting subsidy applications, and more.

Among the support that gradually became available, one large source of funding was the Assistance Fund for Enterprises Promoting Content Creation for Global Needs (also known as J-LODlive) from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. Intended for organizers who canceled or postponed performances, J-LODlive subsidized half the costs of mounting new performances according to the number of performances canceled as long as they were streamed online for audiences overseas. It provided a big boost toward reopening. That said, the troubles for the industry were not over. Calculations from the PIA Research Institute announced on October 27 showed that the year's ticket sales for theatre and performance events amounted to ¥59.2 billion, less than 30 percent of the previous year's.

Rapid Growth of Streaming

Video streaming increased rapidly.

Shizuoka Performing Arts Center shifted its World Theatre Festival Shizuoka, held annually between April and May, to an online format and renamed it the World Theatre Festival on the Cloud. The artistic director, Miyagi Satoshi, described this as like

“inventing a ‘crab stick,’ since we cannot have the ‘crab’ that is theatre.” Video recordings of performances, talks between Miyagi and overseas theatre artists, footage of rehearsals, poetry readings, and more were streamed, and when there would ordinarily be a performance, they showed the empty outdoor theatre. The Masterpieces by Phone Theatre (*Denwa de meisaku gekijo*) program, where actors gave live readings by telephone, was very popular.

On May 25, the State of Emergency was lifted. Honda Theater in Shimokitazawa, Tokyo, restarted with *DISTANCE*, a solo performance streamed without an in-person audience, on June 1. On the first day, it attracted an audience of around two thousand.

Even though audiences were now allowed back inside theatres, many performances incorporated livestreaming to cover the losses incurred by reduced seating.

New forms of expression also appeared. The no meets company of young theatre practitioners that carries out everything remotely, from the planning through to the rehearsals and performance, has garnered attention. Its inaugural production, *Never Allowed Out Moratorium* (*Mongai fushutsu moratoriumu*), written and directed by Komikado Yuichiro, portrayed young people whose college lives take place entirely online. It attracted a total of five thousand viewers. The Osaka fringe theatre Wing Field set up an online “virtual theatre” in May, whose “opening” production was HMP Theater Company’s *Subordinate Subordinate Boss Subordinate Boss* (*Buka buka joshi buka joshi*), written by Otake Masanori and directed by Kasai Tomohito, featuring video footage superimposing actors performing in different places, which worked in tandem with

the surreal nature of the script to produce striking effects.

One remarkable production was *Ghosts from the Performance of “Lingering Ghosts and Monsters”—Setbacks* (“*Miren no yurei to kaibutsu*” *no joen no yurei—zaha*) at Kanagawa Arts Theatre in June, which filmed part of *Lingering Ghosts and Monsters* (*Miren no yurei to kaibutsu*), a play written and directed by Okada Toshiki whose creation was put on hold. Images of the performing and dancing actors were projected onto a small piece of paper on top of a table by a window. A lost performance was resurrected like an apparition, watched by the audience as dusk gradually fell in the vista outside the window. It was an apt approach for a play portraying the present but based on *mugen* (dream) Noh.

The Doors to the Theatres Reopen

In July, the theatres started to reopen.

The newly rebuilt Parco Theater in Tokyo’s Shibuya district had launched its Opening Series program of productions in March. However, the first of these, *Pizarro* (*Pisaro*), had the majority of its run cut short, while all the performances of the next production, *The Life of Sadojima Takichi* (*Sadojima Takichi no shogai*), were canceled. And finally, the new play written and directed by Mitani Koki, *Actors* (*Daichi*, literally meaning “earth”), opened on July 1.

In a theatre with such preventive measures in place as wearing face masks, disinfecting hands and the soles of shoes, temperature checks, ventilation, “checkered” seating with empty seats on either side of occupied ones, a ban on talking, and nurses stationed on the premises, curtain-up was signaled by a resounding gong. In

how he directed the play in the style of the Tsukiji Little Theatre, which opened in 1924 as Japan's first permanent Shingeki venue, Mitani suggested a parallel between our thoughts about reopening theatres and our predecessors who pioneered contemporary theatre in Japan.

Set in a fictitious totalitarian state reminiscent of Eastern Europe, the play depicts a camp where actors are imprisoned. Though Mitani conceived the play several years ago, these characters, unable to go outside and having had theatre taken from them, now seemed to mirror the actual theatre world since the spring. Many of them are difficult, highly narcissistic types, but all love to perform and take pride in it. As such, when one actor is told he won't get his meal, he instead conjures up a sumptuous feast with only gestures to resist the unjust treatment. The radiance of that scene symbolizes the power and joy of theatre that creates a whole world through the imagination. Dubbed a "Social Distancing Version," the conceit whereby the actors themselves stayed away from one another was, according to Mitani, to be regarded as "one way in which the play had become more interesting." This showed the spirit of this comedy writer who is not content to let restrictions be merely restrictions.

Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre, located in the Ikebukuro district of the city, reopened with a production of *Red Demon (Akaoni)*, written and directed by the theatre's artistic director, Noda Hideki, as part of its Tokyo Theatre Dojo training initiative for young actors. (The play was performed from July to August at Theatre East with four different casts.) A see-through curtain was set up

between the stage and the audience seating that surrounded it on all sides, though rather than obstructing the view when the lights came up, it created a fantastical effect akin to peeping at the stage through water. The various themes in the story of the foreigner called the “Red Demon” who appears at a seaside village, including discrimination, prejudice, intolerance, national borders, and refugees, have only grown more acute since the play’s premiere in 1996. “I have a dream,” as the Red Demon says at one point, now resonated with the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, while the villagers in the play who exclude the foreigner connected with our present-day lives in which those infected with the coronavirus and healthcare workers suffer ostracism and attack. In the autumn, the Romanian director Silviu Purcărete’s production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, as “embellished” by Noda, enjoyed a six-city tour from October to December. Due to the restrictions on international travel, though, the rehearsals were conducted remotely for the most part. Able to come to Japan at the very end, the director finally joined the production in person for the dress rehearsal after his quarantine period was over. It was an impressive, richly subtle production.

At Theatre Cocoon in Shibuya, *Furimun Sisters* (*Furimun shisutazu*), written and directed by Matsuo Suzuki—and his first new play since he was appointed the theatre’s artistic director—ran from October to December. Set in Nishi-Shinjuku, Tokyo, it is a musical (composed by Watanabe Takashi) centering on three people: Chihiro, the convenience store clerk who lives her life without a care; Mitsuko, the star actress in a slump; and Hideyoshi,

their gay best friend who has experienced his own fair share of setbacks. With a drag queen serving as a kind of master of ceremonies, and the living intermingling onstage with the dead, the black comedy overflowed. But within this, Matsuo also conveyed his fierce anger at discrimination and oppression. This theme was encapsulated in the finale, where the performers sang that they were “fed up with sacrificing their freedom.”

Having directed one of the most anticipated productions of the year, *The Cherry Orchard*, which was canceled just as it was set to open in April, Keralino Sandrovich wrote and directed a new play, *The Goddess of Basil Town* (*Beijirutaun no megami*), a kind of fairy tale about the female head of a major corporation who ends up living in a slum. Running at Setagaya Public Theatre from September to October, it filled up the venue with warm laughter that seemed to unwind our spirits that had gotten so knotted up in the gloomy reality.

Chong Wishing wrote and directed *Crying Romeo and Angry Juliet* (*Naku Romio to okoru Jurietto*), which transposed Shakespeare’s play to the Kansai region of Japan circa 1950 and was performed by an all-male cast. It was a play bursting with the vitality of the common people, the wounds of the 1945 defeat, the emotions of ethnic Koreans in Japan, and abundant humor, but what stood out was the sorrow of lovers at the mercy of intolerance and conflict. It is regrettable that its run, which started in February, was cut short. For the company Bungakuza, Chong also wrote *54 Eyes* (*Gojuyon no hitomi*), which was directed by Matsumoto Yuko and staged at Kinokuniya Southern Theatre Takashimaya in

November. The play examined the postwar situation for Japanese and ethnic Koreans at a Korean school on Shodo Island in the Seto Inland Sea.

Watanabe Eri's Tireless Efforts, and Plays by Women, about Women

In December 2019, Japan received its worst gender equality rating to date, ranking 121st out of 153 countries. In the theatre world, the number of female artists is increasing, but men enjoy a deep-rooted dominance among the award judges and critics. In an effort to upset the status quo, Watanabe Eri organized a showcase of the work of female playwrights in the summer. In the end, this Feminine Power Project could not happen due to the pandemic, but she did manage to pull off a “prologue” to the series. This was three plays: a new two-hander, *Crape Myrtle—During the Coronavirus* (*Sarusuberi—korona no koro*), written by Watanabe and directed and performed by Watanabe and Kino Hana, portraying the reality and fantasies of two old women; a stage reading of a Nagai Ai play, *Women Who Want to Tidy Up* (*Katazuketai onnatachi*), which Watanabe directed; and Betsuyaku Minoru's *You Must Go, Laura* (*Kienasai Rora*), which Watanabe both directed and starred in. Watanabe also played the lead role in KAKUTA's *People!* (*Hito yo*), written and directed by Kuwabara Yuko. All of these were superb plays that conveyed a sense of passion and maturity.

The up-and-coming Ichihara Satoko brought *The Bacchae—Holstein Milk Cows* (*Bakkosu no shinyo—Horusutain no mesu*) to Kanagawa Arts Theatre, written and directed by Ichihara and

performed by her own company, Q. This much-talked-about play premiered in 2019 and won Ichihara the Kishida Drama Award. Based on a Greek tragedy, its all-female cast of characters includes a housewife, a half-human, half-beast born when the housewife once injected human semen into a cow, and a chorus comprised of cow souls. From sex to desire, reproduction, discrimination, and abuse, various themes piled up one on top of the other in this play that rushed right at you like a torrent.

New light was also shone on past plays that depicted women.

Murderous Intent Striptease (Satsui sutorippusho), which ran at Setagaya Public Theatre's Theatre Tram in July, was a solo play in which a showgirl tells the audience her story. The play, written by Miyoshi Juro and first published in 1950, was directed by Kuriyama Tamiya. The woman, who coolly regards how male intellectuals changed their views in the prewar, wartime, and postwar eras, was played by Suzuki Anne in a performance of incredible concentration and overwhelming radiance.

At Shinbashi Enbujo Theatre in November, Otake Shinobu played the lead role in Danta Yasunori's revival of *Life of a Woman (Onna no issho)*, written by Morimoto Kaoru (1912–1946). Hired as a live-in maidservant for a family that has accrued its wealth through trade with China, the cheerful young girl shows promise and marries the oldest son, eventually becoming the obstinate, lonely mistress of the house. "No one chose it for me. It was the path I chose." This is a famous line, but what made her choose that path? The question, which is still relevant today, was posed to us through Otake's body.

From October to November, Meijiza staged *Love Burns* (*Koi, moyuru*), directed and adapted by Ishimaru Sachiko from the television drama *Osan's Love* (*Osan no koi*) by Akimoto Matsuyo (1911–2001). Originally the story of Osan Mohee, who was executed as an adulterer in the Chikamatsu Monzaemon play *Daikyoji Mukashigoyomi* (*The Old Almanac*), Akimoto boldly changed the ending so that Osan ultimately leaves to find Mohee, who has been exiled to a remote island. Takahata Atsuko was excellent in the role of the mother-in-law who watches over Osan as she chooses a new life, embodying the female solidarity envisioned by Akimoto, a writer who continued to fight against male society.

At Setagaya Public Theatre from November to December, *Contemporary Noh Plays / Eudemonics—inspired by Noh plays Dojoji and Sumidagawa* (*Gendai nogakushu X “kofukuron”*) saw writer Osada Ikue and writer and director Setoyama Misaki carefully illuminate an image of the people living in Japan today through the Noh plays *Sumidagawa* and *Dojoji*.

The Results of the New National Theatre, Tokyo's Twelve-Year Shakespeare Series

The year yielded a good harvest of translated plays.

The New National Theatre, Tokyo's series of Shakespeare's history plays, directed by Uyama Hitoshi, concluded in October with *Richard II*. This marked twelve years since the *Henry VI* trilogy was performed back to back in 2009. When the series started, Uyama was the artistic director of the theatre, and his hope was surely to build a loose company with actors from various

places and form a single “core” for the theatre. Many actors and crew members did continue to participate throughout the series, so that aim was fairly well achieved, with the capabilities of Shingeki company actors being particularly impressive. The consummate directing was tidy and dynamic across the series, and the framing in *Richard II* whereby the power struggle among the aristocracy developed in view of the commoners was especially effective. The set by Norimine Masahiro, which included creative touches that paid homage to the late Shima Jiro—who handled the stage design for the previous four productions—was outstanding.

Mori Shintaro directed a very sharp production of the Stephen Spender adaptation of Friedrich Schiller’s *Mary Stuart* at Setagaya Public Theatre. In the role of Elizabeth, Sylvia Grab gave a masterly performance.

In December, Theater Fuusikaden in Shinjuku, Tokyo, staged Kamimura Satoshi’s production of *Mrs. Klein*, Nicholas Wright’s straight play set in prewar London and featuring three female Jewish psychoanalysts. Obstinate, somber, and at times funny, Ise Kayo, Urabe Fusako, and especially Nasu Sayoko were superb.

The two contemporary South Korean plays concurrently staged by Theatre Office Natori—*The Time of the Beast* (*Kemono no jikan*), written by Kim Min-jung and directed by Shirai Keita, and *The House Where Boy B Lives* (*Shonen B ga sumu ie*), written by Lee Bo-ram and directed by Manabe Takashi—from October to November at the Small Theatre B1 in Shimokitazawa were also accomplished.

Hirata Oriza’s Seinendan relocated from Tokyo to Toyooka in

Hyogo Prefecture and presented the Toyooka Theater Festival in September. Kinosaki International Arts Center is achieving results with its artist residency programs in the same city, while spring 2021 will see Professional College of Arts and Tourism open with Hirata as university president. This is a place from which new things will surely come.

Yamaguchi, Hiroko

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

(Translation: William Andrews)

Children's and Youth Theatre

Pondering How to Create Encounters with Children

Ota Akira

Postponement of the 20th ASSITEJ World Congress in Tokyo and International Performing Arts Festival for Children and Young People

Just like other theatrical genres, the world of children's and youth theatre faced a variety of problems in 2020, due to the massive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several years in the planning, the 20th ASSITEJ World Congress in Tokyo and International Performing Arts Festival for Children and Young People / MIRAI 2020 was due to take place in May 2020, but at the end of March, we decided to postpone it. At the time, we had thought about going ahead even if only two or three countries could make it to Japan, but looking back now, we can see that our ultimate decision was the wisest move. The ASSITEJ World Congress was postponed until March 2021, and we are now making preparations to hold it. However, due to uncertainties over whether theatre companies abroad will be able to come to Japan, given that the pandemic is not yet showing signs of coming under control across the globe, the event will be a hybrid international festival that combines virtual and physical performances. While we have a mountain of

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issues to work on, from seating numbers to performance styles, those involved in preparations are bringing together the wisdom of a range of people, not only within Japan, but also worldwide, in an effort to work out how we can create encounters between children and artists.

Responding to the Tremendous Blow Dealt by the Pandemic

The pandemic dealt a huge blow to children's and youth theatre, as many performances in kindergartens and nursery schools had been scheduled for the third semester (January to March 2020). The stream of cancellations continued thereafter, with hardly any performances in the first semester of the new academic year (April to July 2020). As of July, the total financial loss suffered by members of the Japan Union of Theatrical Companies for Children and Young People stood at approximately 1.3 billion yen. With performances and almost all other theatrical activities suspended after the State of Emergency was declared, theatre companies explored performances using virtual techniques. However, there are limits to what can be achieved with such constraints, and the difficulties are particularly acute when the audience members are children.

While the Agency for Cultural Affairs and others provided grants and subsidies in various forms to support artists during the COVID-19 crisis, there was nothing tailored to children's and youth theatre, to encourage virtual performances, for example. As such, it would be fair to say that we spent the whole of the self-restraint period racking our brains, pondering how we could create

encounters with children again.

In addition, while the Agency for Cultural Affairs provided generous subsidies for freelancers through its ongoing support program funded by the second supplementary budget, salaried theatre companies and their staff are ineligible, so quite a few people in the children's and youth theatre community missed out on getting help. Thus, the tough situation in the children's and youth theatre world continued, with zero income from theatrical activities in the first semester.

Once the State of Emergency was lifted, performances gradually began again. These were regional initiatives led by local organizations that promote an appreciation for the performing arts, such as children's theatres and parent-child theatres. Through the implementation of rigorous measures to combat COVID-19, performances gradually resumed in mid-June, although a cautious attitude toward performances in schools prevailed. Theatre companies tapped into local knowledge and exercised their ingenuity to ensure safety, by means such as staging performances outdoors and performing for small audiences to avoid the infection risks arising from closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings (referred to as the "Three Cs").

It was the second semester (August to December 2020) by the time theatre companies began to return to schools. Following persistent negotiations between companies and schools, performances were able to go ahead while taking all possible care to prevent the spread of infection. Whereas a company might have given two

performances at a school under normal circumstances, they switched to giving as many as six so that they could reduce the number of people in the audience each time. Under its program to support the creation of opportunities for children to experience culture and the arts, which formed part of the first supplementary budget, the Agency for Cultural Affairs covered the cost of staging theatrical performances in schools. We received an astonishingly large number of applications between mid-July and mid-September. It was a sign of teachers' desire to provide their students with some small measure of enjoyment outside the regular curriculum at a time when almost all school events were canceled due to COVID-19. We had envisaged receiving few applications, but it turned out that our worries about how to use our allotted budget were needless. Our resulting discovery of how many adults in schools were keen for us to stage performances was probably the silver lining of the pandemic for us. The Agency for Cultural Affairs offered its backing, making a commitment to support multiple performances in schools with at least one hundred students, to ensure rigorous measures to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Issues Faced in Resuming the Theatre in Schools Program

In the second semester, our established Theatre in Schools program resumed, albeit gradually. Again, in consultation with the schools hosting us, we created opportunities to stage plays while implementing thorough infection prevention measures. We take all the measures we can think of, such as keeping a distance of three meters between the stage and the front row of seats, keeping all the

windows open during the performance to ensure good ventilation, minimizing interactions with the audience, keeping our distance when the audience is leaving, and providing all students with face shields for any scenes where the actors speak their lines while standing amid the audience seating.

Reducing audience numbers to avoid the Three Cs is the biggest challenge. All schools have limits on the number of people who can fit in their gymnasiums and in some places, this is as low as one hundred people or a single year group for one performance, which is a big difference from the capacity we had envisaged for Theatre in Schools performances in school gymnasiums until now. Accordingly, schools are requesting that we give two or three performances, where previously we had given only one. However, there is no concomitant increase in the performance fee. This is another major impact of COVID-19, but we have had to accept it, as otherwise we would not have been able to give any performances at all.

Due to this situation, we have gradually increased the number of performances at individual schools under the Student Development Program through Culture and the Arts and the Program to Create Opportunities for Children's Arts and Culture Experiences funded by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, and have ultimately accepted one hundred people per performance. While performances like these that are funded by commitments from public funds are not a problem, theatre companies involved in the Theatre in Schools program outside this scope had to accede to schools' requests, no matter how harsh the conditions.

Nevertheless, the theatrical community is prioritizing efforts to give performances in some shape or form, due to our desire to get face-to-face with children again. Everyone involved with children's and youth theatre is anxious to ensure that we receive some form of government financial assistance to support our activities if this situation continues.

Another concern is the age groups eligible for public financial aid, particularly aid provided by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. Under the current circumstances, grants and subsidies to fund the performing arts for children amid the pandemic basically only focus on performances for students in compulsory education—that is to say, elementary and junior high schools. However, we in the world of children's and youth theatre focus on children from infancy all the way up to the age of eighteen. In other words, as nursery schools, kindergartens, and high schools are excluded from the available support, it is hard for us to create opportunities to get back in front of audiences in those age groups. Opportunities to experience live stage performances are equally essential for children of all ages, not merely elementary and junior high school students, so we hope that similar support will be extended to age groups outside those in compulsory education.

The Situation for Children

It is said that, before entering compulsory education, children mostly learn and grow by watching and mimicking adults. During the pandemic, children in some nursery schools who had not been eating lunch properly began to do so after seeing their nursery

teachers take their masks off and eat.

However, having had to spend so much time cooped up at home due to the closure of schools and other places where children usually spend time, such as children's centres, libraries, and parks, an increasing number of children are suffering from isolation and stress.

Baby Theatre Project *Air* (*Kuuki*)

The Japan Union of Theatrical Companies for Children and Young People's baby theatre project *Air* (*Kuuki*)—a work devised for babies aged up to eighteen months—had a number of performances postponed from May to August. In a concession to the need for measures to combat the spread of disease, we halved audience numbers to ten pairs of parents and babies from the initially planned twenty and increased the number of theatre staff on hand.

Baby theatre performances only fulfill their mission when there is contact between the performers and the audience. Although there was no direct physical contact, there were certainly many situations that involved something very close to it. We took the utmost care when staging *Air* (*Kuuki*). When audience members expressed a preference to avoid all forms of contact, we had them affix a sticker to their clothes to indicate that preference. Other measures we devised to ensure the performances could go ahead safely included deploying staff tasked with immediately disinfecting any objects that the babies had touched and providing each family with its own cloth to sit on, to make it easier to judge the spacing between seats.

While audience numbers were limited, we were nonetheless

surprised to find that even the performances of *Air (Kuuki)* in August and later more or less sold out. I am sure that some parents and children were motivated to come by the desire for solace amid the spatial restrictions resulting from the pandemic and the confined nature of parent-child life under those circumstances.

In the case of performances for high schools, with most school events canceled and students lacking opportunities to go out with their friends, some high school students told us that going to the theatre to watch a play was their happiest memory of their final year at high school. Now more than ever, we in the world of children's and youth theatre need to make our voices heard, to ensure that we can create opportunities for all children to encounter the performing arts.

As well as causing the cancellation of school events, the pandemic has dealt a blow to extracurricular activities. School drama clubs have been unable to hold rehearsals, deemed one of the extracurricular activities most prone to involving the Three Cs. Amid this situation, virtual drama festivals have taken place in some areas, including the Japan Online Student Theater Festival. With all the usual contests canceled, the people involved have been delighted to be able to bring initiatives such as this to fruition, despite taking place without an audience.

Introducing New Works

Some theatre companies managed to create new works despite the COVID-19 crisis. Kazenoko Theatre Company debuted *Change: From the Recesses of the Library (Chenji: toshoshitsu no sukima*

kara) (written and directed by Oma Hiroyuki), a remake of a work performed as part of the Japan Union of Theatrical Companies for Children and Young People project Drama University 2019 (Shibai no daigaku 2019). This play depicting a child in search of a place where they belong examines various contemporary issues.

In December, Puppet Theatre HITOMI-ZA performed its new work, *The Happy Foundling* (*Gokigen na sutego*). Based on the popular children's picture book of the same name (written and illustrated by Ito Hiroshi), it was adapted and directed by Kazenoko Theatre Company's Oma, who also created the aforementioned *Change*. An emerging trend is the creation of works that transcend the boundaries of theatre companies.

Staged by Tokyo Engeki Ensemble in September, *Can You Whistle, Johanna?* (*Ojiichan no kuchibue*) (written by Ulf Stark and adapted for the stage by Hirowatari Tsunetoshi) is a new work by the theatre company's young director Miki Genta. A stage version of a picture book by a popular Swedish author, this unembellished, unsentimental production raises high hopes for Miki's future as a director. Other theatre companies that have succeeded in creating new works despite difficult circumstances include Theater Urinko, Puppet Theatre PUK, and Puppet Theatre Musubiza.

Although the future remains uncertain, artists whose work is aimed at children will not give up under any circumstances. As I said before, the world of children's and youth theatre is continuing to think only of how we can create encounters with children again.

Ota, Akira

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

(Translation: Eleanor Goldsmith)

Looking to the Future of Japanese Classical Dance – A Time for Self-Reflection

Hirano Hidetoshi

1. About “A Japanese Version of Galapagos Culture”

Japan has a brilliant traditional culture which has seen a unique evolution. I have often described the worlds of traditional culture, especially the world of *nihon buyo* (Japanese classical dance), as being a kind of “Galapagos-form” of culture. In other words, it forms a kind of independent ecosystem that supports flora and fauna existing nowhere else.⁽¹⁾ But the digitalization of cultural products of all kinds that occurred in 2020 in response to the impact of COVID-19 on Japanese society shook up the core of this Galapagos culture. And the impact on the world of Japanese classical dance showed how this Galapagos ecosystem exists within the larger culture of Japan (which can be considered a kind of Galapagos culture as well). In other words, even within Japan, the reaction of Japanese to traditional culture is to treat it as something distant and exotic, like Western lovers of Japanese culture who simply praise this culture as being “a precious heritage.” Or they talk about how “wonderful” it is, without considering the contents of that culture and the real problems that it faces. This is true not only

of mass media in Japan, but also of Japanese society as a whole and so-called people of culture.

The media should report on the much more pressing problem of the Japanese traditional performing arts, which is that it is gradually losing its essence and the things that should provide its core. The reason the media ignores this situation is probably because this is a key blind spot in Japanese people who are considered to be “cultured.”

The “cultured” people that make up the intelligentsia of Japanese society are the elite that have studied modern European and American culture and have continuously dominated the political and economic sectors in Japan. However, with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the repressed frustrations of many ordinary people who were forced to follow them started to be expressed. The philosopher Uchiyama Takashi has written that:

“In the age of the Internet, this structure began to change. On the Internet, anyone can express themselves and can find a group of people with similar opinions. People who once had to stay silent and suffer the domination of the cultured class are now able to speak.” (*Tokyo Shimbun*, October 11, 2020, morning edition)

So, when the traditional performing arts are presented to the public through the Internet, the standards and delicate social relationships that govern the Galapagos culture of Japanese classical dance are naturally also affected. Performances are now shown online, and the Japanese mass media deals with whatever is presented indiscriminately as something very “precious.” This uncritical praise without examining the reality is the “Japanese Galapagos culture.”

The performance scheduled for June 2020 sponsored by the nonprofit organization Nihon Buyo Kyokai (Japanese Classical Dance Association) of a new dance creation for Japanese classical dance, *4th Nihon Buyo Mirai-za Sai: Yume ou ko* (*The Child Pursuing Dreams*) had to be postponed due to the pandemic. But even though the performance was postponed, there was still a lot of work for the production committee to do. The production committee carried this out by email and online conferences. The *riji* (director) of the association in charge of Mirai-za was kabuki actor Matsumoto Koshiro, who is also the head of the Matsumoto school of classical dance and was the director of the performance. The association has several directors of varying status, who are prominent dancers, often being the heads or *iemoto* (heads of schools) of Japanese classical dance, Nihon Buyo.⁽²⁾ While the production committee was busy carrying out the business of maintaining the project online, Koshiro and the production team of the NHK Educational TV program *Nippon no geino* (*Japanese Traditional Performing Arts*) decided to present *Yume ou ko* in the TV program as a dance video instead of a live performance. Within kabuki as well, Koshiro has pioneered many innovative productions. Koshiro used the special talents that he developed as part of the Galapagos ecosystem to change NHK, an institution dominated by the cultured class and their way of thinking. This is a good example of the interaction of the Galapagos worlds of traditional arts and the cultured class of Japan and how that interaction affects Japanese classical dance.

The dance was presented in two programs, *Yume ou ko – Hare*

no hi e no Michishirube (The Child Pursuing Dreams: The Road to Its Formal Presentation), broadcast on July 3 with a rebroadcast on the sixth, and *Odore, ima koso – Koshiro to buyoka 47-nin no chosen (Precisely Because of the Situation: Now Dance! – Koshiro and 47 Dancers Face the Challenge)* broadcast on October 16 with a rebroadcast on the nineteenth. Koshiro's belief that "We can only do this now, and let's do something we can only do now!" was realized in "a single video composition performed by 47 Japanese classical dancers who never gathered in one place." It included scenes of ordinary people selected by public audition dancing Koshiro's choreography. The result was about a 20-minute dance. The contribution of video director Muraoka Reiya was very important, and perhaps because the use of an animation of the Edo period pestilence-battling creature Amabie was so striking, it seemed to be more of a video composition than a dance piece. Presenting the dance as a video made it look like the dancers were automatons in a peepshow, and the feeling of human presence disappeared.

I believe that although it is based on tradition, Japanese classical dance is fundamentally a live stage art. So, for me, a filmed dance is not an artistic piece in its own right. It should be seen as part of the archive of dance, a record that can be used as a clue to the compositions of the past and a resource for composition in the future. So, from this point of view, filmed Japanese classical dance must always be seen as a necessary evil, something imposed by the necessity of dealing with the pandemic. Instead of depending on filmed performances, I think that what is necessary for a Japanese classical dancer now is to endure and use this time to consider the

essence of the art as a live performance.

Of course, individual Japanese classical dancers are also joining the trend of presenting works online. The group Goyokai, which includes three directors of the association among its five members (directors Nishikawa Minosuke, Hanayagi Motoi, and Yamamura Tomogoro and non-directors Hanayagi Juraku, and Fujima Ranko who are not directors of the association but are very prominent within their dance schools), began presenting paid broadcasting on November 8. The performance itself was a proper performance of Japanese classical dance filmed in the small hall of the National Theatre on October 6–7 without an audience. The broadcasts continued until December 6.

After the declaration of a State of Emergency, there were only two performances of Japanese classical dance produced⁽³⁾ by members of the Goyokai, Yamamura Tomogoro's *Dainikai Tomogoro no Kai (The Second Tomogoro Recital)* (August 23, National Bunraku Theatre) and Fujima Ranko's *Nihon Buyo no kanosei, vol. 3 (The Possibilities of Japanese Classical Dance, vol. 3)* (November 3, Asakusa Kokaïdo). The *Nihon Buyo no kanosei* performance featured a dance that could be described as a part of the repertory of the Goyokai, *Ada yojin (Useless Caution)*, an adaptation of Beaumarchais's play *The Barber of Seville*, which is famous from the Rossini opera, and Ranko performing a solo *su odori* (dance with no stage set or costume in formal kimono) adaptation condensed from Goethe's *Faust* titled *Magakami (The God of Misfortune)*. Both pieces were written, staged, and choreographed by Ranko himself. *Ada Yojin* was originally created as a

su odori dance for a single male performer, and this performance was an experiment in restaging the dance with five female dancers. Neither of the two pieces was an entirely new composition, but they showed a proper Japanese classical dance approach to coping with the pandemic. Considering the fact that otherwise people would not be able to see these things, in this particular case, it was a good thing that people were able to see what was done in a video online.

2. The Death of Hanayagi Juo II and “Japanese Classical Dance” as It Is Now Practiced

I would like to say a few words about the death of Hanayagi Juo II and what it meant for Japanese classical dance.

At 8:00 p.m. on September 27, I received a fax from Hayagi Jusuke V with the following obituary: “Hanayagi Juo II (legal name Hanayagi Hiroshi) passed on at 6:52 a.m. on September 26 (aged 89). We are informing all the people who have been supportive over the years along with our profound gratitude for all that they have done. In view of the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with the wishes of the deceased, the funeral will be held with only close relations.” It went on to say, “Time will be reserved at the Hanayagi Studio for people who wish to say their final farewells,” and specified that this time would be September 28 to October 1. Jusuke was in charge of the funeral arrangements and also said that “the general public will be informed through newspapers and other media after the funeral on October 3.” In response to this careful and polite message, keeping within the restraints of the pandemic, I went to Juo’s house, where his body was, and paid my

respects. However, despite all the precautions in this message, two days after receiving it, I was surprised to see the death reported in the morning newspapers on September 29. Despite all the care to carry out the late Juo's wishes and Jusuke's desire to deal properly with the pandemic, I could not help but feel that this disregard of the wishes of the leadership of the Hanayagi school was reminiscent of all the sensationalism in the media in the past regarding the question of succession in the Hanayagi school of dance.

The Hanayagi school of dance is pivotal to the modern history of Japanese classical dance. It began with the activities as a dancer and choreographer of Hanayagi Jusuke I (1821–1903) and became established as a dance school and gained prominence with his son Hanayagi Jusuke II (1893–1970). The name “Hanayagi Jusuke” became the name of the *iemoto*, but in 1963, when he passed on the name to his daughter, who became Jusuke III (1935–2007), Jusuke II took the retirement name of Juo I.

The father of Hanayagi Juo II (1931–2020) was Hanayagi Yoshijiro IV, who was related to Jusuke I and later took the name of Hanayagi Hodo. In 2007, Yoshijiro was about to take the retirement name of Kan'ō when Jusuke III died suddenly. As scheduled, he took the name of Kan'ō, and the following day, at the funeral of Jusuke III, he announced that he was becoming Jusuke IV. Although this succession was decided by the top leaders of the Hanayagi school, there were some members of the school who did not accept it. In particular, there was opposition from Jusuke III's nephew Aoyama Takahiko, who said that before her death, Jusuke III had designated him to succeed as Jusuke IV. These controversies even

led to court cases. This dispute made the problems of the traditional hereditary succession and *iemoto* system obvious and became a media sensation. At this time, he was a director of the association and was active himself with the staging of classical dances, new dance creations, and choreographing for the Takarazuka troupe. As a director of the association, he brought a new spirit, doing the essential work of bridging the gap between Japanese classical dance and the general public. Hanayagi Juo I made great contributions to the establishment of the association and was also his uncle. I thought that his efforts were very fitting for someone who had himself directly seen the activities of Juo I and as such, I applauded his efforts.

When he succeeded as Hanayagi Jusuke IV, in view of his achievements in dance and since this was all the private business of the Hanayagi school, I had assumed that the members of the school had all agreed to this succession. But in 2016, when Juo II passed on the name of Jusuke to his grandson Hanayagi Sosuke (legal name) as Jusuke V and himself took on the name of Juo II, this surprising succession and name-taking revealed all the hidden tensions in the Hanayagi school.

But there was a particular objection to his succeeding to the name “Juo.” People said that this violated an unwritten law and that the name was intended to be a term of honor and retirement name for Jusuke II alone. Whatever the merits of this argument for the Hanayagi school of dance, it had unintended consequences for the Nihon Buyo Kyokai. One of the most important awards presented by the association for the recognition of young dancers has

been the Hanayagi Juo Prize (renamed “The Hanayagi Juo New Performer Prize”), which had been awarded to thirty-nine dancers was discontinued in 2017. It is important to consider the fact that the beginning of the association is intimately connected to Juo I in both its emphasis on the twin tracks of classics and new creations and the fact that the basic structure and concrete operations of the association depended on having Juo I in the center. The death of Juo II must focus attention on the severe problems facing the association. There is not only the problem of supporting the administration and activities of the association, which depended so much on Juo I and Juo II, but the problem of the extreme reduction in the number of members as well.

3. The COVID-19 Pandemic and Individual Japanese Classical Dancers

In the face of the force of the pandemic, with the declaration of a State of Emergency by the government in March, performances of Japanese classical dance were canceled or postponed one by one. In August, performances in general gradually began, but among them, there were extremely few performances produced by individual Japanese classical dancers. Most Japanese classical dancers make their living by teaching and so, unlike the theatrical world that must constantly have paid performances, classical dance recitals are more like a cooperative effort by the teacher and students. So, without hesitation, they could all cancel or postpone performances.

In a usual year, performances by individual Japanese classical dancers are concentrated in the autumn for participation in the

annual Arts Festival sponsored by the National Cultural Agency. This year, the Arts Festival just barely managed to be held. For example, in the field of Japanese classical dance for the Kanto region, there were only four entrants. So, the only striking performances this year were the two held by organizations. These were the 63rd *Nihon Buyo Kyokai Performance* (February 22–23, large hall of the National Theatre) sponsored by the association and the *Mai no Kai-Keihan no Zashikimai* (*Mai Performance-Dances from the Banquet Chambers of Kyoto and Osaka*) (November 21, small hall of the National Theatre) sponsored by the National Theatre as a contributing event to the Arts Festival.

In the association performance, as is usually true, most of the dances were dominated by the directors of the association, but seen in terms of the performances of individual dancers, the acting of Fujima Etsuko as the bird peddler in the Kiyomoto dance *Yoshiwara Suzume* (*The Sparrows of the Yoshiwara Pleasure Quarters*) (performed by Wakayagi Juen and Fujima Etsuko) was particularly memorable. In recent years, she has shown her skills with *su odori*, and in this dance from the kabuki theatre, performed with a costume and wig, she splendidly displayed the same powerful torso and unerring sense of form that she has presented in *su odori*.

In *Mai no Kai*, the two themes of transmission of tradition and new creation were striking. In terms of transmission, the two dances were *Kanawa* (*The Iron Crown*) by Inoue Yachiyo and *Sekai* (*The World*) by Yamamura Hikari. *Kanawa* was an adaptation of the noh play about a jealous, vengeful woman and was presented in

the distinctive style of the Inoue school of dance using a parasol as a prop and with no stage wig. The concentrated power of this dance was extremely memorable. *Sekai* is choreography originating in the Kitayamamura school of dance which has been preserved by Yamamura Tomogoro in the associated Yamamura school of dance. This solo dance was performed by Yamamura Hikari, and she vividly showed the interaction of a patron and a courtesan in the world of the pleasure quarters. In terms of new creation, there was the new choreography for the dance *Utou (Murrelet)*, based on the noh play about the torment in Hell of a hunter of birds, and a new piece choreographed by Tomogoro called *Kakurenbo (Hide and Seek)*, danced by Yamamura Wakayuko, which was a short piece but was playful and witty.

4. The Position of Japanese Classical Dance in the Age of COVID-19

In an age when everybody's activities in society are curtailed by COVID-19, and its influence has extended to cultural art forms as well, isn't it time to consider what the position of Japanese classical dance in society should be? I think that setting the standard based on the theatrical world, which is focused almost solely on commercial performances, is extremely dangerous. I think that this is precisely the time when we should reevaluate the people who are the fundamental support of the Japanese classical dance world, the individual teachers of Japanese classical dance, especially in terms of their vital role in the education of children. As we carefully examine the society brought on by the pandemic, we must consider

what is necessary for the physical and emotional education of our children, what needs to be done to carry that out, and where the tradition of Japanese classical dance fits in the process. I think that this is a good opportunity for us to think about how to physically and emotionally communicate Japanese classical dance, which forms the nucleus of the traditional Japanese performing arts and Japanese culture.

Struggling to cope with the 2020 pandemic, Japanese classical dance had very little presence. As mentioned above, the Arts Festival was held, and the most prominent entrants in the field of Japanese classical dance were Fujima Mon's *Mon no Kai* in the Kanto division and the *Shunju-za Young Performers Dance Recital* by the Kyoto Arts University Stage Arts Research Center, Ichikawa Ennosuke and Fujima Kanjuro in the Kansai division. Although these both received the prize for excellence, neither seems worthy of discussion as an achievement in Nihon Buyo for the year. In addition, both of the National Cultural Agency's awards for dance – the prize for excellence and the prize for young artists – went to ballet dancers. This had never happened before and is a sign of just how much Japan has come under the domination of the music, dance, and theatre of Europe and America since the beginning of the modern period.

Japan suffered in the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, but in 2020, the pandemic threatened to destroy Japanese society. We must learn from the example of our predecessors who faced similar threats in the past to find a way to overcome these threats and survive in the future.

Translator's Notes

- (1) In Japan, “Galapagos-style” is a popular word. For example, until recently, fold-out cell phones continued to be popular alongside smartphones and were called *gara-kei* (Galapagos-styled mobile).
- (2) In the modern period, Japanese classical dance has survived by being organized into schools, for example Hanayagi or Fujima, under a head called an *iemoto*. The *iemoto* is responsible for granting artistic names and licenses for teaching and collecting the associated fees and, secondarily, for the artistic direction of what is performed by the members of that school.
- (3) In Japanese classical dance, ticket fees do not cover the costs of a performance. The costs of a dance recital are usually covered by the dance students who perform. If it is a recital to showcase the dance teacher, the teacher must cover the costs, and the teacher’s recital is often paired with a performance by students. When a performance is sponsored by a public organization like the Japanese Classical Dance Association or the National Theatre, a substantial portion of the costs is covered by the sponsoring organization.

Hirano, Hidetoshi

Nihon buyo (Japanese classical dance) critic. Born in 1944 in Sendai and graduated from the theatre division of the literature department of Waseda University, majoring in kabuki. Worked for a publishing house as an editor for such periodicals as *Okinawa no geino* (Okinawa Performing Arts), the quarterly journal *Minzoku geino* (Folk Performing Arts), and the monthly magazine *Hogaku to buyo* (Japanese Music and Classical Dance). To explore the art of physical expression, he became a critic and is a member of advisory committees for institutions including the Japanese Cultural Agency and the Society for the Advancement of the Arts in Japan. In 2016, his book *Hyoron Nihonshintai hyogen shi: kodai, chusei, kinsei* (Critique: History of Japanese Physical Expression – Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Period) (Nihon Buyo-sha) was published.

(Translation: Mark Oshima)

Ballet

A Spirited Response to the Pandemic

Urawa Makoto

Trials and Tribulations of the Ballet World

In 2020, the whole world was battered by the novel coronavirus, and the ballet world in Japan is also facing a tough time. At the beginning of the year, nobody expected anything like this to happen, but at the end of February, various public facilities, including the national theatres, closed one after another as people began to realize the severity of the situation. Since the declaration of the State of Emergency in April, people have stayed home and worked hard to avoid the Three Cs (closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings). In spite of this, the number of new cases and critically ill patients spiked dramatically at the end of the year.

Ballet productions were presented as usual until the end of February. In March, we began to see a mix of postponements and cancellations. Theatres were completely closed from April to mid-June and then reopened gradually, reducing capacity by fifty percent. By September, most of the restrictions had been lifted. Organizers took thorough measures to prevent the spread of the virus and the number of productions slowly increased. But compared to previous years, the number of productions was very low.

Impact on the Ballet World and the Response

Without performing or training, dance companies and schools had a hard time staying afloat and maintaining their artistic skills and standards. Damage to the dancers' mental health was severe. Ballet productions require a long rehearsal period, a large cast, and many staff members. Artists need to work in close collaboration. Even when the restrictions were lifted, organizers had no choice but to take matters into their own hands and devise thorough measures to prevent the spread of the virus, which required a lot of money and effort.

The economic impact of this pandemic was immediately reflected in ticket sales, donations, grants, tuition fees, and training fees. Even though income drastically decreased for many ballet companies, fixed expenses still had to be paid. Dancers and teachers do not get paid unless they have jobs. The government and municipal bodies offered various programs in support of artists. For example, the "Go To Event" campaign discounted ticket prices with government grants, and the Tokyo government's Support Program for Arts and Culture scheme offered 100,000 yen for each video submitted. But these schemes have not made up for the loss incurred and can be very complex to apply for. Many artists are still struggling to find a performance platform to make ends meet. However, we are now seeing greater efforts to support artists, following the example of European countries. This offers a glimmer of hope; at least art is considered essential to our lives.

Standstill and Restart

Let's take a closer look at the ballet world of 2020. I divide the whole pandemic into three separate phases based on my personal view: "the beginning of the pandemic," when productions were forced to cancel or postpone; "the standstill phase"; and "the adjustment phase," when normal activities resumed after the lifting of restrictions.

The Beginning of the Pandemic (January to March 2020)

2020 kicked off just like any other year. Performances went on as usual until the end of February, when the national theatres closed down.

The main highlight of January was Tani Momoko Ballet's performance commemorating its seventieth anniversary. Two former étoiles of the company, artistic director Takabe Hisako and senior company member Ito Noriko respectively directed and choreographed *Lisette* (Tani Momoko and Messerer's version of *La Fille mal gardée*) and the new work *Fiorito*. At the end of the month, K-Ballet Company, led by Kumakawa Tetsuya, presented *Swan Lake*.

The Tokyo headquarters of the Japan Ballet Association, which supervises the ballet companies across the country, presented *Le Corsaire*. The Kanagawa, Kansai, and Chubu branches of the same association also held their annual performances in January and February. In mid-February, NBA Ballet Company presented the first act of *Dracula* with the principal dancer of The Royal Ballet, Hirano Ryoichi, and Homan Naoya's new piece *Werewolf (Okami*

otoko) in a double bill called *Horror Night*. On February 26, all public cultural venues were shut down. The New National Theatre canceled the remaining performances of *Manon*. Cancellations or postponements of other productions and competitions followed.

I was particularly interested in the three performances in March, in the middle of this pandemic turmoil.

The first was Sadamatsu-Hamada Ballet's *Creative Works 31* (*Sosaku recital 31*), presented on March 14. It had a limited audience and only invited people connected to the company. It featured intriguing works including Alexander Ekman's *CACTI*, a Japanese premiere, and Mori Yuki's new piece.

Next was Matsuyama Ballet's *Swan Lake, New Version* (March 20). The new pairing of Morishita Yoko and Horiuchi Jyu attracted a lot of attention. The venue was changed from Kanagawa Kenmin Hall to the company's own studio space, Museion. The audience was limited to the people involved.

Lastly, The Tokyo Ballet's *La Sylphide* was presented according to schedule in Tokyo Bunka Kaikan on March 21 and 22. Masks were distributed to those who did not have them, and outer and inner doors were kept open for ventilation during the breaks.

Standstill Phase (April to June 2020)

A State of Emergency was declared on April 7, and all performances and activities were canceled except for remote training and streamed performances. In May, the restrictions were lifted gradually, and dancers resumed their classes and training while social distancing. Performances were allowed to resume after June 19.

Organizers were asked to reduce capacity by fifty percent or more and to take thorough measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

Adjustment Phase (July to December 2020)

As I already mentioned, ballet productions require a long rehearsal period and thorough planning. It is impossible for them to make a profit if they have to reduce their capacity by fifty percent. Many companies are reluctant to present their works for just this reason.

Understandably, the first full-fledged ballet production to appear after the State of Emergency was the production by the New National Theatre that started on July 24. The piece was *RYUUGUU – The Turtle Princess*, directed and choreographed by Moriyama Kaiji. It was aimed at a young audience and based on an old Japanese tale, featuring first-class ballet dancers from the National Ballet of Japan. The seats in front, behind, to the left, and to the right of each audience member were all left vacant, in a staggered arrangement. Audience members tore their own tickets on entering. The queue was arranged to avoid forming a crowd at the entrance, and after the show, the audience left in successive groups. Programs were stacked flat and face up so that the audience could take them themselves. Audience members were asked to wear masks, sanitize their hands, check their temperatures, and not talk during the performance or cheer the performers. The venue was thoroughly ventilated and movement to and from the bathrooms was regulated to avoid crowding. No merchandise, food, or drinks were sold in the lobby. Everyone in the audience wrote down their contact numbers and seat numbers in case of emergency. These

became the standard COVID-19 measures for all theatres.

Ballet Chambre Ovest held Kiyosato Field Ballet at the end of July and the beginning of August in Yamanashi prefecture. Kiyosato Field Ballet has been held at this time every year. This year, the company benefited from the outdoor nature of the performance, taking all necessary precautions. Ballet Chambre Ovest presented *Coppelia* in October in their home ground, Hachioji.

From August on, Asami Maki Ballet Tokyo and Akiko Tachibana Memorial Foundation presented their rescheduled productions with some revisions, including the school tours that had been canceled in March. Asami Maki Ballet Tokyo presented a gala *Summer Ballet Concert*, featuring their company dancers. Matsuyama Ballet presented *Swan Lake, New Version* at the revamped LINE CUBE SHIBUYA, the former Shibuya Public Hall. This was a special COVID-19 version of the production presented to a limited audience in March. *Summer Concert* presented by Yamato City Ballet led by Sasaki Mika drew a lot of attention: an anthology of various Japanese horror stories.

On September 11, the government announced that the maximum number of people allowed in a venue would increase to five thousand. Although most of the restrictions were lifted, many organizers still struggled. They voluntarily reduced capacity by fifty percent in view of poor early-bird ticket sales and public safety. In September, The Tokyo Ballet presented *Sleeping Beauty*, a piece for young audiences that had been postponed in August, and *Don Quixote*.

In October, K-Ballet Company presented their signature piece,

Le Corsaire, and the National Ballet of Japan presented *Don Quixote* under their new artistic director Yoshida Miyako; her first time to open the season. *Don Quixote* replaced the Peter Wright-choreographed *Swan Lake*, originally planned before the pandemic. The Tokyo Ballet's *M* and Asami Maki Ballet Tokyo's *Sleeping Beauty* were also presented in October. Large-scale productions were prominent during this period. *M* was presented to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of the late novelist Mishima Yukio; this piece was dedicated to Mishima by Maurice Béjart. The Tokyo Ballet earned the Award for Excellence from the Agency for Cultural Affairs Arts Festival for this piece.

From mid-November, various companies presented their own versions of *The Nutcracker*, beginning with Matsuyama Ballet and Star Dancers Ballet, and followed by K-Ballet Company, The Inoue Ballet Foundation, Asami Maki Ballet Tokyo, The Tokyo Ballet, National Ballet of Japan, and Ballet Chambre Ouest in December. Tokyo City Ballet and Noriko Kobayashi Ballet Theatre presented suites of excerpts from *The Nutcracker*.

At that point, everything was back to normal; various versions of *The Nutcracker* were enjoyed at the end of the year. And of course, all companies took thorough anti-COVID-19 measures. The Inoue Ballet Foundation even revised their piece to make it shorter. Ballet companies, theatres, and audiences worked harder than ever to keep the shows going. Some new pieces, created for paid video streaming or livestreaming, replaced live performances, and some live performances were streamed simultaneously. I understand that there was no other choice, and the pieces were well

thought-out, but I do feel that their impact was limited. It only increased my appreciation of seeing ballet as a live performance.

Outside the Metropolitan Area

The first performance in the Kansai region after the lifting of restrictions, was Sadamatsu-Hamada Ballet's *La Primavera* on July 26. The company were commendably active: they presented *Don Quixote* in October followed by *The Nutcracker* in November. Company Deco Boco, a unique company known for their fun family shows and decorated theatre lobbies, presented *La Fille mal gardée*, which had been postponed in April. In the Kansai region, major companies canceled and postponed their performances one after another. The only prominent production was Ballet Company West Japan's *Giselle*, led by Sejima Satsuki and Andrew Elphinston and featuring Nakamura Shoko.

In the Chubu region, Yukari Ballet's anniversary concert and Sumina Okada Ballet School's *Giselle* were presented in October, Setsuko Kawaguchi Ballet's *My Roman 2020* in December, and Ochi International Ballet's *The Nutcracker* at the end of the year. Overall, the number of productions was very low compared to previous years.

However, the pandemic might not be the only reason for this; the death of director/choreographer Fukagawa Hideo may also have had some effect. Fukagawa was a leading dancer throughout the world in the 1960s and 70s. Back in Japan, he presented new pieces and reinterpretations of the classics in various regions. He battled illness in recent years but didn't stop working. Four or five

companies in the Kansai and Chubu regions had planned to present pieces choreographed and directed by him this year. However, his health worsened during the pandemic and he finally passed away on September 2. The companies had no choice but to abandon or postpone their productions. He was only seventy-three years old. The contribution he made to the ballet world was huge, and he will be deeply missed.

Competitions and Foreign Participation

At any given moment in Japan, there is always some competition going on. But this year, all competitions were of course canceled, postponed, or scaled down. Preliminary rounds were mostly skipped. To avoid overcrowding dressing rooms, participants were asked not to wear makeup. Many organizers skipped awards ceremonies altogether.

After the Ballet de l'Opera National de Paris production that ran at the end of February and the beginning of March, all foreign productions were canceled, both individual- and company-based. This had a huge effect on ballet companies planning to invite foreign guest dancers and on ballet studios that regularly hired foreign teachers. But it was a welcome opportunity for Japanese dancers to get exposure and recognition.

A Critical Phase

Although some productions were affected when a staff or a cast member tested positive, we have been blessed that shows continued during this difficult time. The situation in European countries

going through strict lockdown is even worse. Ballet dancers and ballet companies always have to cope with financial and social insecurity; they have worked harder than ever to survive this pandemic. Were things to get worse, our ballet world could be pushed to the brink of collapse. This is a critical moment, and I sincerely hope that society and the public sector understand the situation and support the artists who are forced to work ever harder to support themselves.

Urawa, Makoto

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

(Translation: Ishikawa Mai, Donncha Crowley)

Contemporary Dance and Butoh

Strengthening Ties during the Coronavirus Crisis – Going Back to the Body

Tsutsumi Hiroshi

The terror of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) swept across the world in 2020. The first wave lasted in Japan from April to May, the second from July to August, and the third began in November, with the number of cases rising each time. Especially in dance, it is a crisis of art form because it involves close contact such as touch and partnering. In this piece, I will look back chronologically at how dance artists have dealt with the uncertainty.

Before the Pandemic

On January 16, the first case of the coronavirus was detected in Japan. And on February 3, a cruise ship, *Diamond Princess*, anchored in the Port of Yokohama with coronavirus-infected passengers onboard. February is an important month for Yokohama; it is normally studded with big events.

Yokohama Dance Collection is the largest international contemporary dance festival in Asia. It marked its 25th anniversary this year. In all, two hundred twenty-six groups from thirty-eight countries applied to enter the competition. Yokoyama Ayano

received both the Jury Prize and the Porosus Endowment Fund Camping 2020 Prize for her upbeat performance with her delicate physical presence. Shikichi Osamu won The French Embassy Prize for Young Choreographers for his conceptual work which evokes a live art event. Hashimoto Roma took home the Outstanding New Artist Prize. Her work embraced theatrical elements, full of elegant movement, with meticulously planned music and costume design. Past winners such as Kurosu Ikumi and Tamura Koichiro also presented pieces, which were well worth seeing. The Third HOT POT East Asia Dance Platform was also held, in collaboration with the dance festivals of Hong Kong and Seoul. Although two groups from China were unable to come to Japan, the other artists presented their work as scheduled.

A string of ambitious works reflecting contemporary international issues was presented at TPAM (Performing Arts Meeting in Yokohama). Among these were the world premiere of *No. 60* by Pichet Klunchun from Thailand and *IBUIBU BELU: Bodies of Borders* by Eko Supriyanto from Indonesia. Performance Troupe TAIHEN, a group of physically disabled people, led by Kim Manri, revived the *Sandbox Bento (Hakoniwa bento)* and shocked the foreigners in the audience. Dance Box from Kobe presented a revival of *Freeway Dance* choreographed by Nakama Ayaka, which was created as part of their local community project. Fieldworks, led by Heine Avdal and Shinozaki Yukiko, presented three works that “defamiliarize” and “activate” the theatre space. According to the organizer, 962 people from forty-six countries or regions (476 from overseas and 486 from Japan) took part in the festival, which

attracted a total audience of 31,302.

Yokohama Dance Collection and TPAM featured a variety of progressive works, and both completed their programs successfully.

The Effects of the Pandemic

On February 15, there was a cluster of cases at a night club in Osaka. On February 26, the government asked organizers to voluntarily put a halt to all events. The live event sector had to decide whether to go on as scheduled, but with social distancing (avoiding the “Three Cs”: closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings); or cancel events altogether; or postpone; or livestream without the audience.

Teshigawara Saburo postponed the world premiere of *Triptych Night (Mitsuori no yoru)*, a collaborative work with violinist Shoji Sayaka, the day before opening night. But he later presented his previous works, *The Idiot (Hakuchi)* and *Shirabe (Shirabe sho to dansu ni yoru)*, as part of a series commemorating the inauguration of a new artistic director at Aichi Prefectural Art Theater. In Theater X (Cai), he performed new pieces: *Night on the Galactic Railway (Ginga tetsudo no yoru)*, based on the novel of the same title written by Miyazawa Kenji, and *L'Année dernière (Kyonen)*, inspired by Alain Resnais's film *Last Year at Marienbad*. He also presented eleven works from the *Update Dance Series #67–77*. The creative appetite that stirred and grew within him shone clearly through.

PUNCTUMUN, led by Seki Kaori, premiered *Mukumeku-mu*.

With the stage covered with powdery artificial snow, the piece evokes the layout of a Zen garden and a black-and-white ink painting. The dancers contact each other through relaxed and minimal movement. From time to time we hear a delicate wind chime, a voice, breathing, or a bomb exploding. The wind blows, the smell of *tachibana* orange lingers. The title *Mukumeku-mu*, almost a palindrome, recalls three Japanese words combined together, meaning “wriggle,” “sprout,” and “give birth.” It is a sensual piece delicately depicting the transformation from winter to spring, the squirming of the living and the cycle of nature.

Suzuki Yukio recreated his previous work *Life Spins, Time Flows* (*Jinsei wo tsumuguyoni tokino nagare wo kizamuyoni*). His solid direction involved frequent use of blackouts and avant-garde choreography. It was clear that his company had matured.

Onodera Shuji's Company Derashinera premiered *Wherever the World* (*Dokomademo sekai*). It is based on pantomime and nonverbal physical expression. It is a complex tapestry of absurd and bizarre scenes and perspectives, peering through the looking glass or out the window. He entertained the audience with his playful and unique visual trickery.

Yasumoto Masako toured with her new work, *Diagram of a Fully Automatic Kleshas-Brain* (*Zenjidobonno zuizuizu*). The dancers make repetitive shaking movements similar to “twerking” with their whole bodies. This is an expression of unending insatiable desire and greed, and it overwhelmed the audience.

OrganWorks, led by Hirahara Shintaro, premiered *HOMO*. Inspired by Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the

performers narrate human history through dance, without any ready-made dance method or vocabularies. Because both dancers and choreographer were in the middle of a development phase, they were very active throughout the year. In addition to experimenting with their new piece *ENEN*, they also livestreamed their performances.

Kasai Akira presented *A Gathering for a Duet (Duo no kai)*, an anthology looking back at the duets he danced with his mentor, Ohno Kazuo. Kawaguchi Takao played Ohno's role, and Kasai Mitsutake played Akira's role, with projections of photos and footage from *Gigi* (1963), *The Foothills (Oka no fumoto)*, 1972), and *The Ailing Dance Mistress (Yameru maihime)*, 2002). It was as if the two dancers reunited beyond time and space in *Kasai Akira's Ohno Kazuo (Kasai Akira no Ohno Kazuo)*. However, on March 26, when the government requested all residents in the metropolitan area stay at home, the rest of the performances were canceled.

Strengthening Ties within the Dance Community through Video Streaming

Although dancers were able to perform throughout March, the first wave hit Japan in April and May. Based on revisions made to the Novel Influenza Special Measures Act, the government declared a State of Emergency on April 7, targeting seven prefectures including Tokyo and Kanagawa. By April 16, the State of Emergency had expanded to the rest of the country, and it continued until May 25. The theatres were closed for over a month and a half. During that period, many artists continued their work by

livestreaming or posting videos of their performances online.

Art collective KyukakuUshio, founded by Moriyama Mirai and Tsujimoto Tomohiko, posted their new work on YouTube in May. Working in a forest area and on an outdoor stage they made themselves, they streamed *Groundbreaking Performance (Jichin performance)* in September. The performance itself took place with a limited audience in the early hours of August 15.

Dairakudakan, led by Maro Akaji, created their own YouTube channel and posted thirty-three videos throughout the year as part of their series *We don't ask questions, we dance. We don't look for answers, we dance no matter what. (Kototowazu mai sore kotaezushite odoru)*. The annual outdoor performance *Laughing Blue Sky (Warau aozora)*, held in Hakuba village every August, was livestreamed without an in-person audience.

Sankai Juku had to cancel their tour. In May, one of their young members, Matsuoka Dai, began posting new videos for a promenade-style event LAND FES, which he also directed. The work is site-specific and involves a collaboration of dancers and musicians. The performance is recorded without an audience, and online viewers pay a fee.

The founder of Co. Yamada Un, Yamada Un, renovated her own studio and launched a remote community center online called Bunburyodo. The company posted two versions of her dance video *BODY GARDEN*, an outdoor version and an installation version. *Migiwa*, a piece created during their stay in Kanazawa, was performed in public and also made available as a video. *Cosmos*, a performance filmed at the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre, is

scheduled to go on a national tour in 2021. They actively embraced the combination of live performance and video streaming.

The platforms for dance artists also had to make many adjustments in order to stay afloat. Dance Base Yokohama (DaBY) postponed their opening for two months until June 25. This platform is run by SEGA SAMMY Arts Foundation. Karatsu Eri, a senior producer at Aichi Prefectural Art Theater, was appointed Artistic Director. Although some productions were postponed, DaBY conducted artist-in-residence programs and workshops and tried out livestreaming.

Session House in Kagurazaka, Tokyo, launched online projects. *Session Online Theater* started in May, and *Theater Wherever You Are (Dokodemo shiata)* in October. They livestreamed twenty-nine productions altogether.

Small private theatres, important for supporting artists, got huge support from artists and audiences during the pandemic, and that led to a strengthening of ties within the dance community. Both Session House and d-Soko raised money through crowdfunding; both reached their fundraising goals.

The Reopening of Theatres

The theatres reopened after the first wave died down, but the second wave followed from July to August. Event organizers were kept on constant alert.

Moriyama Kaiji directed and choreographed *RYUGU – The Turtle Princess* for The New National Ballet of Japan in July, but because a staff member tested positive for COVID-19, two

performances had to be canceled. One dance piece, *Le Petit Prince* (*Hoshi no ojisama Saint-Exupéry kara no tegami*), had its world premiere in November. It featured prominent dancers such as Yamada Aoi, Sakai Hana, Kojiri Kenta, and Shimaji Yasutake, together with a talented artistic team. Moriyama's creative genius shone through this year.

Condors, led by Kondo Ryohei, had to cancel two new works that were due to be presented in public theatres. However, they managed to stay in touch with their fans by posting videos. They presented *Beautiful Dreamer*, a piece organized by Condors themselves, at Shibuya Public Hall on September 5. They set their own guidelines for COVID-19 under the supervision of a medical expert, and they also had a nurse standing by. The venue could accommodate up to two thousand people, but they reduced the capacity by 50 percent. The performance was shortened to one hour to allow better ventilation. They gave two different performances on the day, while taking thorough measures to prevent the spread of the virus. They blended powerful group dancing with loud rock music, comedy sketches, a puppet show, and guitar-accompanied singing. As usual, their energy and humor gave audiences hope.

Kondo also choreographed and starred in *Hounding Hounds* (*Inubito*), written and directed by Nagatsuka Keishi, for The New National Theatre. This piece, which resembles a zombie film, follows a dog-loving family who move into a town contaminated with Inubito (dog/human) disease. The ten contemporary dancers who also played acting roles greatly contributed to the piece, physi-

cally expressing the process of humans transforming into dogs.

This was not the only theatre piece in which contemporary dancers were prominent. Co. Yamada Un presented both the theatre and the dance versions of *NIPPON CHA! CHA! CHA!* during the same year. And for the musical theatre piece *Night on the Galactic Railroad 2020* (*Ginga testudo no yoru 2020*), directed by Shirai Akira, Yamada Un choreographed and her company members starred. In the revival of *Bacchae - Holstein Milk Cows* (*Bakkosu no shinnyo Horusutain no mesu*) of theatre company Q led by Ichihara Satoko, Kawamura Mikiko played a thrilling and eccentric therianthrope (human beast).

Going Back to the Body

From October to December, before the third wave hit Japan, many artists focused on the themes of politics, social issues, everyday life, and the value of life itself.

Dance Archive Network put on *Me, Dancing in Japan* (*Odoru nihon no watashi*) by Project Oh!yama, led by Furuie Yuri. It features a modern interpretation of a trilogy, *Japan (Nihon)*, which was originally presented in 1940 during the war, to enhance national prestige for the Tokyo Olympics that in fact never happened. Oh!yama showed videos of themselves running an Olympic-torch relay and played rap music. It could be called a satire of the originally planned 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

We Assemble Together (*Watashitachi wa sorotteiru*) by Momonga Complex had its world premiere at Festival/Tokyo 2020. Each performer was confined in their own space, just like the

quarantined life they were experiencing. The audience could walk around freely and visit each space. The leader of the company, Shiraga Momoko, manipulated the cameras to livestream the performance while also doing the live commentary through the microphone. The scenes were constructed with detached and laid-back direction but the singing and dancing combined to show that we are all connected although we are apart.

Iwabuchi Teita BODY MAP premiered *Gold Experience* using Iwabuchi's own method called "the matrixed body". The dancers relax their whole bodies while forcefully inhaling to reaccess the root of their own bodies. They moan and groan, developing their sounds into movements. This method was inspired by the late butoh dancer Murobushi Ko, by Mitsuoka Hidetoshi's martial arts technique, and by Shirakawa Shizuka's kanji ideograms in *kinbun* characters (inscriptions on bronze wares) and *kokotsu* characters (inscriptions on oracle bones and carapaces), as well as by ancient rituals and artworks.

Onodera Shuji's Company Derashinera premiered *Knife*. When one of the performers tested positive for COVID-19, all performances were canceled and rescheduled. Onodera saw a similarity between the quarantined life in the pandemic and that depicted in *Boule de Suif* by Guy De Maupassant: an idle life with no one to blame.

Kaeru-P, led by Ozono Koji and Hashimoto Noriyasu, installed a temporary playground in Kichijoji Theatre and held an event called *PAP PA-LA PARK* where families with kids could relax and have fun.

odoru kumagai hiroaki company deliberately used a lot of contact movements in their new work, *Licking, Floor* (*Nameru, yuka*), to convey the importance of human connection and communication in a world full of division and solitude.

Tanaka Min premiered *Yo! Don Quixote* (*Mura no Don Kihote*). A man, who arrives at a village riding a horse, is nursed by a villager and starts a new life farming. It seems to be based on Tanaka's personal experience. His longtime pupil Ishihara Rin appears to play the role of Dulcinea. She lets out a strange sound like a deranged woman and utters disquieting words such as, "sacrifice, perjury, artificial legs, bribery scandal" (all words starting with "gee" as in "geek") like a word association game until she ends by repeating "Pseudo-country. That's nothing new." The text, put together by linguistic director Matsuoka Seigo (an editorial engineer), seems to be criticizing recent corruption in the political world. Tanaka, carrying a long rod, rides the horse as though representing the people of Japan; he charges at the spinning curtain symbolizing a giant windmill.

Kasai Akira livestreamed *Dancing the Constitution of Japan* (*Nihonkoku kenpo wo odoru*) without an in-person audience. It is based on the arguments surrounding the amendment of the constitution, which was a major topic at the time of its premiere in 2013. It digs deep into themes of the separation of powers and human rights issues like freedom, equality, and philanthropy. And the seriousness of these themes seems even deeper nowadays. Recently, the Abe cabinet was harshly criticized for intervening in the judicial branch; for repeating false statements in the Diet, which

is the legislature; for disrupting the separation of powers; and for interfering with human rights. Kasai demanded that everyday life would be free, equal, and safe under the law during the pandemic.

Dumb Type posted the video of their latest performance, 2020, which was canceled in March. It was filmed without an in-person audience. Using motifs prevalent in modern society such as Sustainable Development Goals, artificial intelligence and social networking service, the group stressed the need to stop and think about the accelerated competitiveness of society today – a byproduct of globalization. Simultaneously, the number of cases spiked. The Japanese government failed to declare a State of Emergency at the right time because they didn't want to give up hosting the Tokyo Olympics as scheduled.

Dance New Air, a dance festival held every two years, decided to postpone their program until 2021. As a pre-event piece, Yuasa Ema presented *n o w h e r e*. This was a documentary-style dance piece done in collaboration with Kakizaki Mariko. The footage, filmed at home every day during the lockdown, was projected on a split screen. The piece attempts to reinterpret the meaning of life, with each day's movements being affected by the weather or Yuasa's own physical state or mood. In the second part, Kakizaki, who was pregnant, starts to dance, and the reality of living in this moment becomes clear. Kakizaki also experimented with her piece *Wild flowers* as part of a spin-off event from Saitama Dance Laboratory Vol. 3 in July. She shakes off the paralysis of the pandemic through the dance of the indomitable wildflowers blooming in the rain.

Kurata Midori's akakilike presented a revival of the piece *Like*

the summer sea glittering with so many fun things that it is a waste to spend time sleeping, like a green garden flooded with sunlight, like a sky spreading to infinity so clear and blue as to drive you crazy (Nemurunoga mottainaikurai tanoshikotowo takusan motte, natsunoumiga Kirakira kagayakuyoni, midorinoniwani hikariafureruyoni, eienni tsuzuku kigakuruisona seitennoyoni), which originally premiered in 2019. Together with the members of Kyoto DARC a home for drug addiction treatment and rehabilitation, Kurata recreated their everyday lives like a documentary. Their process of trying to accept who they are and acknowledge reality highlights the difficulty and the weight of life. The piece was a hymn to humanity.

In 2020, everybody in the world had to live a quarantined life. Although the number of theatre productions was limited, it was the culture and art themselves, including online videos and live-streaming, that healed division, solitude, and insecurity around the world. Dance, which is based on the human body, reflected this pandemic in an actual, vivid way and demonstrated the body's own resilience. Dance created an opportunity for audiences to reacknowledge the importance of life and living, to turn their attention to their own bodies and sharpen their senses.

Tsutsumi, Hiroshi

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

(Translation: Ishikawa Mai, Donncha Crowley)

Television Dramas

Messages Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

Nakamachi Ayako

COVID-19 in Television Dramas

Television dramas were among the many social institutions forced to adapt to COVID-19. Serials scheduled for broadcast starting in April faced shooting cancellations and major broadcasting delays. Nevertheless, creators working under endless limitations in this trying period managed to deliver some timely messages in “remote drama” style.

The leader of the pack was *Things Being as They Are Now, We Made a New Television Drama* (*Ima da kara, shinsaku dorama tsukutte mimashita*) (NHK; May 4, 5, and 8). Advertised as “The first 100% ‘telework drama’ on TV?!”, this series was prepared, shot, and edited remotely. Generally speaking, actors performed on individual sets with fixed cameras, interacting with each other remotely. (Night 1: “Heart in Honolulu, peanut butter for him” [*Kokoro wa Honoruru, kare ni wa piinatsu bataa*]. Scriptwriter: Yajima Koichi. Cast: Mitsushima Shinnosuke, Maeda Aki. Director: Watanabe Kazutaka. Night 2: “Goodbye My Way!” [*Sayonara My Way!*]. Scriptwriter: Iketani Masao. Cast: Kohinata Fumiyo, Takeshita Keiko. Director: Watanabe Kazutaka. Night

3: “Exchange students” [*Ten-ko-sei*; this title pays homage to Obayashi Nobuhiko’s 1982 movie *Exchange Students*, also known in English as *I Am You, You Are Me*]. Scriptwriter: Morishita Yoshiko. Cast: Shibasaki Ko, Muro Tsuyoshi, Takahashi Issei. Director: Ono Michi.)

Before the main broadcast of the WOWOW series *Love in May 2020* (*2020-nen gogatsu no koi*) (WOWOW Prime, June 2–5, approx. 13 min. per episode), the channel streamed it as a free presentation online from May 28 to 31 (YouTube WOWOW Official Channel and WOWOW Members on Demand). None of the cast members met each other, or the director, in person during the creation of the series. The story follows Motoo (Oizumi Yo), who accidentally calls his ex-wife Yukiko (Yoshida Yoh) after finishing his remote work for the day. Yukiko has just come home from her job at a supermarket and answers the call with some reluctance, but the two end up speaking for quite some time. Hints of uncertainty and loneliness soon appear in their fast-moving conversation. The work depicts the emotions it evokes with kindness, warmth, and pathos. (Scriptwriter: Okada Yoshikazu. Director: Matsunaga Daishi. Recipient of an “Excellent” Award from Tokyo Drama Awards 2020, Single Drama category.)

The “remote drama” *Living* (NHK, May 30 and June 6) consisted of four stories woven together by an eccentric but talented writer (Abe Sadao) as he muses on the strengths of humanity and his thoughts about the future. The cast of each of those stories included actual family members, all offering refreshing performances: sisters (Hirose Arisu and Suzu), brothers (Nagayama Eita

and Kento), and two married couples (Nakao Akiyoshi and Naka Riisa; Aoki Munetaka and Yuka in voice-only roles). (Scriptwriter: Sakamoto Yuji. Directors: Kato Taku, et al.)

This Is It for Summer (Korekkiri sama) (NHK Osaka, August 17–21, five episodes, approx. 2–3 min. per episode) told the story of high school students finding their way through the COVID-19 pandemic with grace and determination. Baseball team member Kaoru (Okamoto Kenshi) and classmate Kaoru (Minami Sara), both left with nothing to do after the cancellation of the Koshien summer baseball tournament and a rock festival respectively, run into each other on the town embankments and begin to talk. Both have had something they were counting on taken away, but eventually they come to accept the reality of their situation, reaching a humble but satisfying conclusion: “We’re lucky enough to live on Earth, so I guess we’ll just have to adapt to how things are here.” The work depicts the intersection of two young lives in the COVID-19 pandemic with a fresh touch. (Scriptwriter: Kizara Izumi. Director: Izunami Takamasa.)

The drama-documentary *The World of Non-Essential and Non-Urgent (Fuyo-fukyu no ginga*, literally “Non-essential, non-urgent galaxy”) (NHK, July 23, expanded version broadcast September 26) was a multilayered examination of the words “non-essential and non-urgent,” which have seen a great deal of use during the pandemic. At a pre-shoot medical conference on May 15, director Inoue Tsuyoshi asked the doctor in charge of safety for the project, “Do you think it’s okay to shoot a drama right now? Is that the sort of thing you want to watch?” These questions probe

the very necessity of televised entertainment. The story's setting is a family-run "snack" (small bar) called Snack Galaxy (Sunakku Ginga). Snack Galaxy has curtailed its operations due to the State of Emergency, but are daily life and employment "unnecessary and non-urgent" for this family? The question, posed from many different perspectives, resonates on multiple levels. (Story/Scriptwriter: Matayoshi Naoki. Director: Inoue Tsuyoshi. Cast: Lily Franky, Kaho, et al.)

Fuji TV's *The World Is Made of Threes* (*Sekai wa 3 de dekiteiru*) (June 11) was promoted as a "social distance drama." Hayashi Kento plays a set of fraternal triplets reunited after the State of Emergency ends. Their conversations when they finally meet again are depicted with all the frankness one might expect from brothers in such a situation. (Scriptwriter: Mizuhashi Fumie. Director/Producer: Nakae Isamu.)

New Approaches to Office Romances and Domestic Dramas

During the January television season, *An Incurable Case of Love* (*Koi wa tsuzuku yo doko made mo*) (TBS, Tuesday Drama, January 14–March 17) and *The Kotaki Brothers and Their Woes* (*Kotaki kyodai to shiku hakku*) (TV Tokyo, Drama 24, January 11–March 28) attracted a great deal of attention.

An Incurable Case of Love was a romantic comedy that created huge amounts of buzz on social media due to unbearably charming scenes sprinkled throughout every episode. At the same time, however, it is a serious drama about love and work. This sense of balance made its heroine, Sakura Nanase (Kamishiraishi Mone),

appealing. The story begins when Sakura, a newly qualified nurse, is reunited with Tendo Kairi (Sato Takeru), a doctor she fell head over heels for five years ago. She makes many mistakes as she settles into her new job, but her earnestness allows her to notice patient issues that others overlook. Her coworkers cheer her on, calling her “Little Miss Hero” (*Yusha-chan*). The series distinguishes itself from the tradition of dramaturgy that creates excitement by piling on the conflict, instead depicting the warmth of human relationships. (Scriptwriters: Kaneko Arisa, et al. Directors: Tanaka Kenta, et al. Original Story: Enjoji Maki. Theme Song: “I LOVE...” by Official Hige Dandism. Recipient of an “Excellent” Award from Tokyo Drama Awards 2020 in the Single Drama category, along with awards for Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role for Sato Takeru and Best Theme Song.)

The Kotaki Brothers and Their Woes was a domestic drama of a different color. The story begins with older brother Kotaki Ichiro (Furutachi Kanji), single and living alone. Younger brother Jiro (Takito Ken’ichi) comes to stay in Ichiro’s house after his wife threatens to divorce him. The unemployed brothers decide to start a “Rent-a-Father” business, charging ¥1,000 per hour. Their clientele shows them the many forms family can take. They act as proxy witnesses for divorce papers, attend weddings pretending to be relatives, check in on a young person on the verge of dying alone, and more. The story shows that the relationships within families cannot be reduced to a single template. (Scriptwriter: Nogi Akiko. Director: Yamashita Nobuhiro. Opening Theme: “Adults” [*Otona*] by Creepy Nuts.)

Messages in Dramas After Shooting Cancellations

For around two weeks from April 4 to 19, TBS canceled shooting for all programs. Series that were postponed as a result included the Tuesday drama *My Housekeeper Nagisa* (*Watashi no kaseifu Nagisa-san*) (April 14 debut postponed to July 7–September 1), the Sunday serial *Hanzawa Naoki* (April 19 debut postponed to July 19–September 27), and the Friday drama *MIU 404* (April 10 debut postponed to June 26–September 4).

My Housekeeper Nagisa's promotional tagline was “Straighten out my untidy heart too, mister!” The story follows Aihara Mei (Tabe Mikako) as the arrival of Shigino Nagisa (Omori Nao), a 50-year-old housekeeper, helps her work through some bottled-up frustrations. Aihara devotes all her energy to her job as a medical representative for a major pharmaceutical company, while Nagisa keeps her home in order and cooks her balanced meals. The idea of outsourcing disliked tasks (in Mei's case, housework) to another person is simple, but this drama turns it around by showing a different kind of lifestyle. This in turn gives viewers a refreshing view of the diverse ways to participate in society while refusing to be bound by existing norms. In the finale, when Mei learns that Nagisa is giving up housekeeping, she confesses her feelings to him and forms a new type of family. Poignant scenes like this convey how precious time spent together is. While not addressing COVID-19 specifically, this series did reverberate in our time of widespread loneliness. (Scriptwriters: Tokuo Koji, Yamashita Subaru. Directors: Tsuboi Toshio, et al. Original Story: Yotsuhara Furiko. Theme Song: “Naked Heart” [*Hadaka no kokoro*] by Aimyon.)

Hanzawa Naoki was a sequel to the original series about hero Hanzawa Naoki aired seven years ago (2013), which gave rise to catchphrases like “Take double the payback!” and buzzwords like “grovel.” Hanzawa (Sakai Masato), sent from his metropolitan bank to serve as Sales Planning Department Manager at a subsidiary brokerage, refuses to let others get the better of him, holding fast to his motto of “If someone hurts you, hurt them back.” In the new series, Kagawa Teruyuki (who plays Owada Akira, the bank’s director, to whom Hanzawa is linked by fate) and the rest of the cast threw themselves into their roles, helping the interpersonal confrontations stand out more sharply. Actors faced off with only inches between them, raw emotion visible in their expressions. Ultra-close-ups of these scenes (visual direction) and lines delivered with something like the *kuriage* technique in Kabuki, where the intensity of the words rises as the actor speaks, created an unmissable experience. Lines like “This is . . . a dead end” (Owada) and “Apologize! Apologize, apologize, apologize . . . Apologize, Hanzawa!” (Isayama/Ichikawa Ennosuke) caused a sensation. Having such a large cast confronting each other in close quarters, with no sign of social distancing due to the pandemic, added a unique pressure to the visualizations of tension. Women were also particularly prominent in this series. When the eighth episode was postponed at the last minute from September 6 to the next week due to circumstances relating to the shooting schedule, it was replaced with a live talk/variety show entitled *Live!! Hanzawa Naoki Returns a Favor* (*Nama hoso!! Hanzawa Naoki no ongaeshi*) in a highly unusual move that also attracted much commentary.

(Scriptwriters: Ushio Kentaro, et al. Directors: Fukuzawa Katsuo, et al. Music: Hattori Takayuki. Original Story: Ikeido Jun.)

MIU 404 was originally planned as a depiction of the period leading up to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, but its final episode sent a strong message by depicting Tokyo as it was amid the pandemic. MIU is an abbreviation used by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department for “mobile investigation unit,” which denotes a team that performs initial investigations of new cases. The story follows one such MIU as its members Ibuki Ai (Ayano Go) and Shima Kazumi (Hoshino Gen) race to solve their cases within 24 hours. The events they investigate are rich in details drawn from real life, including road rage, the plight of foreign exchange students, and drug sales among young people. Ibuki and Shima’s efforts are supported by their earnest thinking, expressed in lines like “We can stop people from falling into catastrophic situations. This is a fantastic job!” (Ibuki, Episode 1), “Who you meet, who you don’t—what is the switch that changes where people go?” (Shima, Episode 3), and “One by one, it’s all switches. Kind of like life, right? I want every one of them to count. I don’t want to give up on them!” (Ibuki, Episode 6). This earnestness means that when the two start a new case in face masks, it conveys the importance and bravery of running straight toward things as they happen, whatever they may be, and facing the implications head-on. (Scriptwriter: Nogi Akiko. Directors: Tsukahara Ayuko, Takemura Kentaro, et al. Theme Song: “Electric Shock” [*Kanden*] by Yonezu Kenshi.)

NTV’s *#RemoteLove: Normal Love is Wrong* (*#RimoRabu: Futsu no koi wa jado*) (October 14–December 23) was the only serial

drama starting in October in which the actors wore masks in character. The story begins with a scene set in an office on April 2, 2020. Occupational health physician Ozakura Mimi (Haru) is going around the company giving guidance on anti-infection measures. Her severe character is drawn with a comical twist, but the strain she was under is touched on later. During the COVID-19 pandemic, her views on love also change, and the awkward romance she begins is depicted with tantalizing slowness but a heartwarming feel. (Scriptwriter: Mizuhashi Fumie. Directors: Nakajima Satoru, et al. Theme Song: “Heartsound” [*Shin'on*] by Fukuyama Masaharu.)

In KTV's *My Big Sister's Lover* (*Ne-chan no koibito*) (October 27–December 22), the setting is Tokyo in the period from just before Halloween to Christmas in 2020. At the end of each episode is a caption that reads, “For artistic reasons, our actors do not wear masks, but shooting is performed under expert guidance for safety.” The scene in the first episode at the home centre where heroine Adachi Momoko (Arimura Kasumi) works recalls footage of people fighting over masks early in 2020 when they were in short supply. (Scriptwriter: Okada Yoshikazu. Directors: Miyake Yoshishige et al.)

To depict the reality of 2020 accurately, characters needed to be masked. But how to convey their emotional life to viewers if their expressions cannot be seen? How will those of us in the real world communicate in our own masked lives? What feelings are we nursing? As the COVID-19 pandemic raged, these were the issues television dramas faced.

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(Translation: Matt Treyvaud)

トピックス

Developments in Japan and Overseas

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Poster on how to protect oneself against infection from Spanish Influenza. "Spanish Influenza," published by the Hygiene Bureau of the Ministry of Home Affairs in March 1922 when the pandemic was beginning to subside.

Photograph provided by the Office of Information, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

Developments in Japan and Overseas

Japanese Theatre in the Time of the Spanish Influenza 100 Years Ago

Goto Ryuki

On February 26, 2020, the publication of the "Basic Policies for Prevention and Control of the Novel Coronavirus" brought about the unfortunate cancellation or postponement of numerous theatre performances, exhibitions and the like. The declaration of a State

of Emergency, which was based on the Special Measures Act enacted on April 7, effectively halted the functioning of almost all cultural activities for several months. Historically speaking, this was an unprecedented event. The State of Emergency was relaxed on May 25, and performing arts started to return. As of December, theatres have once again begun opening their doors, taking extra special care, but there has been no end to reports of people in the entertainment world contracting the virus. We are still far from seeing an end to this situation.

The so-called Spanish Flu that rampaged over the world roughly a century ago, between 1918 and 1920, is often mentioned in the context of infectious diseases like COVID-19. It was in 1918 that the pandemic (thought to be a factor in ending the First World War) started to be called the Spanish Influenza in Japan. It took the lives of about 3–5% of the world's population, some 55 million in all. Approximately half the population of Japan (at that time some 55 million) contracted the disease; around 1% of those died. Some 100,000 people perished in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. The death toll from the Spanish Flu has been estimated at more than five times that number.

Historical demographer Hayami Akira, author of *The Influenza Pandemic in Japan, 1918-1920: The First World War between Humankind and a Virus* (Fujiwara Shoten, 2006), the first study of its kind in Japanese, is the authority on this event. It is one text that bears rereading now in light of COVID-19. This essay will frequently cite it for its references to the Spanish Flu.

It is still not widely known what was the impact of the Spanish

Flu on cultural circles, so it is worthwhile to draw on the historical memory of a century ago for insight into the past.

The Spanish Flu: A Three-Year Global Pandemic

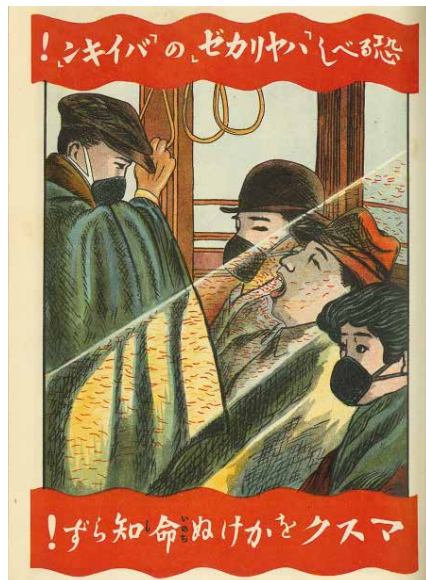
In an essay called “A Sheaf of Influenza” published in the January 3, 1929 issue of *Jiji Shinpo*, Kishida Kunio wrote as follows:

“Spanish Influenza: a strange but beautiful name, but the villain that is this epidemic has snatched away the lives of our mothers and fathers, our lovers, our children, our maids. This “influenza” is different from cholera or the plague, other faces for the God of Death. It is as if we could see her thin, white arm

holding up a jewel translucent behind a veil of thin gossamer.”

Ten years after the pandemic, in writing that “we have by now long grown used to the name ‘influenza’ as something forever intimate, close to us, but by the same token we cannot grasp its true form,” Kishida underscores the menace of this disease. His lyrical turn of phrase captures the dread of a disease whose identity could not be defined.

In the study mentioned earlier, Hayami Akira describes how the influenza struck Japan in three waves.



Poster showing how to wear a mask. “Spanish Influenza,” published by the Hygiene Bureau of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Photograph provided by the Office of Information, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

The first wave, called “a spring portent,” started in May 1918 and was said to end in July. Though many were afflicted with a high fever, there were hardly any mortalities. Since a number of the sumo wrestlers in the May tournament came down with the flu, it was called the “Sumo Cold.” As the disease spread, the virus had time to mutate.

Having survived the summer, the virus took on a new form, ushering in its second wave from autumn into winter. What was called the period of the “pre-epidemic” stretched from October 1918 until May 1919, leading to the deaths of 266,000 people. November 1918 was particularly severe, resulting in school closures and seriously affecting transportation and the communication environment. Mortalities peaked in January, leading to a backlog at crematoria across the country.

The third wave lasted from December 1919 until May 1920. As many as 187,000 died in this so-called “post-epidemic.” The case fatality rate had been comparatively lower in the pre-epidemic, but because so many had contracted the virus, total mortalities had been higher. In the post-epidemic, fewer contracted the virus, but there were more deaths proportionately. As many as 5% of those who contracted the virus died.

The pattern was that the epidemic would subside in the summertime, only to mutate and come back with a vengeance in the fall and following spring. The Spanish Flu lingered a long time in Japan, striking the country in three waves, and even when it was over, it took some months before the disease could be brought completely under control.

The Death of Shimamura Hogetsu While in Rehearsal at the Meijiza Theater

Many notable people lost their lives during the pandemic, but one of the most famous was theatre critic, playwright, and director Shimamura Hogetsu.

This was in late October 1918, just as there were signs of the onset of the second wave. Shimamura's Geijutsuza (Art Theatre) Troupe had scheduled its November production at the Meijiza and were in the midst of rehearsals when its feature actress, Matsui Sumako, caught the virus. Hogetsu, who had left his wife and children to live with her, also contracted the disease.

So too did Akita Ujaku, who was in rehearsals at the Meijiza, and he records in his diary how the three of them—Ujaku, Sumako, and Hogetsu—all came down with the flu:

Caught the cold. A terrible temperature! I feel dreadful, and ache all over. (October 26)

The cold is getting worse and worse. My whole body aches. High fever. (It's the flu.) (October 27. *Diary of Akita Ujaku*, vol. 1, Miraisha)

If Ujaku had caught the virus during rehearsals or at a party, it was likely that Sumako and Hogetsu got it the same way.

Ujaku seems to have caught a lighter



Shimamura Hogetsu (1871–1918) in his study. A graduate of the Tokyo Senmon Gakko (later, Waseda University). After studying in England and Germany, he established the Literary Society (Bungei kyokai) with his teacher Tsubouchi Shoyo. Formed the Geijutsuza (Art Theatre) Troupe in 1913 with Matsui Sumako. Photograph provided by the Museum of Modern Japanese Literature

version of it, because he soon recovered and went to see Sumako and Hogetsu:

“Master Hogetsu’s heart is weak and he appears to have difficulty breathing. I was told they’d called on a doctor to check on him.

Sumako seems much better.” (October 30)

Ujaku recorded the following day that Hogetsu had taken a turn for the worse and was unable to go to the Meijiza.

Sumako, who had gradually recovered, returned to rehearsals, but a week after contracting the disease, Hogetsu came down with pneumonia and passed away shortly after 2:00 a.m. on November 5. News that his condition had become critical did not reach the rehearsal space at the Meijiza until dawn. Sumako and the rest of the company were too late; only the doctor and a nurse were there at the end. Hogetsu’s teacher Tsubouchi Shoyo wrote in his diary that day, “Shimamura Takitaro [Hogetsu] passed. On the thirty-first of last month, he caught the disease when looking after Sumako. They report that last night he suddenly had a heart attack and died!” (*A Collection of Unpublished Shoyo Documents*, Vol. 1. Shoyo Association)

After the death of Hogetsu, their artistic director, their production at the Meijiza opened only one day late. Sumako continued to perform, but on January 5 the following year, while in production at the Yurakuza, she hanged herself, thus following Hogetsu in



Funeral service for Shimamura Hogetsu held at the Geijutsu Club in Ushigome, Tokyo, November 7, 1918. Matsui Sumako, Nakamura Kichizo, writers, and other artists in attendance. Photograph provided by the Museum of Modern Japanese Literature

death. Her suicide was an important reason why Hogetsu's passing was so memorable.

Catching the Spanish Flu around the same time as Hogetsu, Akutagawa Ryunosuke wrote to friends that he had taken to his bed, and in a letter to Susukida Kyukin he referred to Hogetsu as follows:

“Please beware of the influenza. If you catch it, you mustn't overdo it, even a little. If you do, you'll suffer a terrible relapse. I tried to get up and work on my manuscript but with terrible consequences. I think it must have been the same with Shimamura-san. I arose from bed only just yesterday.” (November 9. *Collected Works of Akutagawa Ryunosuke*, Vol. 18. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.)

Akutagawa caught it again the following February, and in March, he lost his father to the Spanish Influenza.

The tanka poet Yosano Akiko, writing in the November 10 issue of the *Yokohama Boeki Shimbun*, mourned the death of Hogetsu as a great loss to the literary world, in an essay called “In Bed with the Cold.” This piece is fresh in the memory because it became a subject of lively discussion online during COVID-19 infections.

Akiko wrote that one of her own children had caught the flu at school then passed it on to other members of the family. She could not hide her fury against the government, writing:

“Why did they not immediately order the temporary closures of dry goods stores, schools, businesses, factories, exhibitions, everywhere large numbers of people gather, in order to put a stop as soon as possible to the spread of this virus? Instead, the public health section of the police department, using the media, merely

advised people to stay away from places where people gathered. School doctors told the children much the same.”

This was the cry of alarm of a worried mother of eleven children, directed at society at large.

Multiple Cases of Contagion in the Takarazuka Girls Revue

Let us turn back the clock to before Hogetsu’s death and examine a case in the theatre world early on in the pandemic. This occurred in the Takarazuka Girls Revue (present-day Takarazuka Revue Company), which was founded in 1914.

The Takarazuka Girls Revue encountered the Spanish Flu during the first wave of the pandemic, from late May to early June 1918, while on tour in Tokyo. Choreographer Umemoto Rikuhei, who was leading the troupe, wrote about the situation on May 29 as follows:

“From the day we arrived in Tokyo (May 22), I’d heard news that some kind of dreadful cold was going around, but today three or four members of the company came down with it. After changing her kimono and putting on a hakama skirt to go out shopping, Tsukuba [Mineko] was suddenly running a fever of 40 degrees Celsius and Matsuyama [Namiko] similarly came down with the fever. Then two or three members of the orchestra came down with it. Everybody was in an uproar for a time, but fortunately, thanks to the swift attention of a physician, they soon recovered.”
 (“Account of the Tokyo Tour,” *Kageki*, issue 1, August 1918)

Although this tour (which included a preliminary performance at the Imperial Theatre [Teigeki] and shows at several other

venues) ended without incident, if one consults the “Daily Record of the Takarazuka Girls Revue Training Institute” printed in each edition of their journal *Kageki*, one can see that cases of students contracting the virus continued. For example, in the entry for October 25, 1918:

“The flu that is currently afflicting the whole world has struck several members of the company. Kumoi [Namiko], Oe [Fumiko], Amatsu [Otome], Amano [Kakuko], Sekimori [Sumako], Wada [Hisako], Uji [Asako], and others, one after the other, took ill. Casting was badly disrupted for some time.” (*Kageki*, issue 3, January 1919)

As the top stars of the company were infected with the virus, the company was suddenly thrust into assigning understudies in their roles. In the midst of all this, Uji Asako, who was admitted to Takarazuka Hospital, contracted pneumonia and passed away on November 5, with her mother by her side. It appears she had a weak heart. In a matter of only ten days since catching the virus, the Spanish Flu snatched away the future of this young girl, then only eighteen years old.

More infections occurred during the May production at the Imperial Theatre. The *otokoyaku* [actor specializing in male roles] star from the first cohort of graduates from the Takarazuka School, Takamine Taeko, claimed she couldn’t sing because of a sore throat. But her music teacher and concert master Kane Mitsuko said, “I can understand your concern as a singer, but I don’t care if your throat bursts or you cough up blood. Today, just go out there and act till you drop!” Takamine stifled her tears and put on her

makeup. Watching her, Kane Mitsuko also reported that “inside I was weeping.” (Kane Mitsuko, “Record of a School Tour,” *Kageki*, issue 5, August 1918)

The curtain opened. Their teacher Harada Jun managed to ride out the scene of Mineko’s solo by bringing in the chorus before she lost her voice. Once the show was over, Mineko was rushed to the hospital, but her recovery was not easy, and Harada and the other members of the company were hard put dealing with one actor after another coming down with the disease.

After that, one can read several accounts related to the Spanish Flu in the “Daily Record of the Takarazuka Girls Revue Training Institute,” but as cases began to fade, so also did the reports of the flu.

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Continuous Cancellations at the Imperial Theatre and Kabukiza Theatre

Even while the Spanish Flu was spreading, theatres continued to open as before. Yet at the Imperial Theatre, for example, where the Takarazuka Girls Revue performed, a newspaper article reported that intermissions had been increased because more than half of the stage carpenters had caught the flu (November 5, 1918, *Yomiuri Shinbun*). There was no denying that the virus was spreading backstage.

Kabuki actor and artistic director of the Imperial Theatre Onoe Baiko VI contracted the flu toward the end of 1918 and due to high fever could not participate in rehearsals for the January production. Baiko canceled his performances on recommendation

from his physician and the production had to get by with an understudy in his place (*Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, January 3, 1919). Hatsuse Namiko, the actress performing the role of Soga no Manko in the second play on the bill, *Horai Soga*, also caught it, but performed the role in spite of being ill as she considered it an honor to stand in for Baiko (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 5, 1919).

Around the same time as Baiko, Kataoka Nizaemon XI, along with his wife, also took to bed with the flu, running high fevers over the New Year holiday. The opening of the January production at the Kabukiza had to be postponed (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 5, 1919).

Nizaemon absented himself from the Kabukiza in February due to the flu, no doubt concerned about his own prognosis. Baiko's own state of health did not improve and, convalescing in Yokohama, he caught pneumonia and became very ill (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, February 11, 1919). He had no choice but to cancel his planned appearance in the February production at the Kabukiza. His recovery took longer than expected.

In 1920, the playwright who oversaw scripts at the Imperial Theatre, Migita Nobuhiko, contracted the virus, then pneumonia. He was admitted to the hospital on January 8 but died three days later. It is said that his entire family caught the disease. That a whole family could catch it from a single member is indicative of just how contagious the flu was.

Promoting the Wearing of Masks and Quarantining the Ill

At the beginning of 1920, when the disease was still raging, a

document called “Influenza” issued by the Central Sanitary Bureau attached to the Home Department of the Imperial Japanese government recommended measures to prevent the spread of the virus, including the use of masks, quarantine for those who had contracted it and, depending on the situation, the postponement of events and closure of schools. It urged members of the audience in theatres, *yose* (small playhouses for *kodan*, *rakugo*, and other story-tellers), and movie houses to wear masks during the pandemic and ensure that restrooms were properly cleaned. In some circumstances, theatres were even urged to postpone performances. (In any event, theatres and movie houses did not close.)

As essential items to prevent the spread of infectious droplets, masks became a symbol of the current conditions. “Stay away from the ill. You can catch it from coughs and droplets. The Spanish Influenza is at its peak.” (*Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, October 25, 1918)

From the beginning of the pandemic, headlines like this appeared regularly in the newspapers. The January 11, 1920 issue of the *Tokyo Asahi* led with warnings like “See the terrifying mortality rate—influenza ushers in an age of terror—if you cough even once, stay home!”



Article on the hazards of airborne contagion. (*Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, October 25, 1918)

followed by exhortations like “Don’t forget to wear a surgical mask,” and “Hurry and get inoculated.” The February 8 issue of the *Yomiuri Shimbun* ran with the headline “1,600,000 infected to date, 47,000 deaths in five days, the worst now in Osaka and Miyagi,” reporting that, while the rate of infections in the capital had begun to subside, the spread of the virus had reached the entire country.

The painter Kishida Ryusei, who had been living in Kugenuma, recorded his impressions on entering Tokyo on January 17, 1920:

“Fearful of catching influenza, I prepared by gargling and putting on a mask. I saw somebody wearing a mask around Fujisawa. There used to be in Tokyo one out of a hundred who was infected, but now everyone is wearing a mask on the assumption that as many as one in twenty have caught the disease. A truly disturbing sight.” (*Journal of Ryusei, Abridged* [Tekiroku Ryusei Nikki], Iwanami Bunko)

One of the purposes of Ryusei’s visit to Tokyo was to see financier and collector Shibakawa Terukichi. Shibakawa was Ryusei’s first important backer and, though not seriously ill, was laid up with the virus. Tokyo, now a city of masked faces, had turned into something “disturbing” in Ryusei’s eyes, adding another dimension to our own image of the city during the spring of 2020.

The work of fiction that best captures this state of affairs is a short story by Kikuchi Kan called “Mask” (*Kaio*, September 1920). Kikuchi, who had a weak heart, was especially apprehensive, no doubt because his friend Akutagawa Ryunosuke had contracted the disease not once, but twice, even going so far as writing his

death poem. His descriptions of the city and the protagonist's anxious state of mind, believing that catching the virus was tantamount to a death sentence, are very vivid.

The protagonist, who seems very much like a stand-in for Kikuchi himself, avoids going out on pain of death, obsessively gargling morning and night, and whenever he is absolutely forced to leave the house, he makes sure he is wearing a mask packed with gauze. His spirits rise and fall with every fluctuation in the death rate reported in the papers. As the threat of the pandemic begins to subside in spring and the number of people wearing masks decreases, still he keeps his on. As the third wave of the disease is being brought under control by the middle of May, his desire to wear the mask begins to fade. By comparing Kikuchi's rough sketch and Kishida Ryusei's observations, we are able to form a

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Article reporting the third wave of the Spanish Flu. (Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, January 11, 1920)



Poster stressing the practice of "coughing etiquette." "Spanish Influenza," published by the Hygiene Bureau of the Ministry of Home Affairs. Photograph provided by the Office of Information, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

picture of how life in the city changed over the course of several months.

Even after the three great waves of the pandemic had passed, its influence remained. One example is how kabuki actor Ichimura Uzaemon XV, who had earlier caught the flu, performed at the Shintomiza in January 1922, despite having a high fever and being racked with coughs. Over his doctor's advice to rest, Uzaemon continued to perform, saying it was auspicious to do so in the first production of the year (*Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, January 8, 1922).

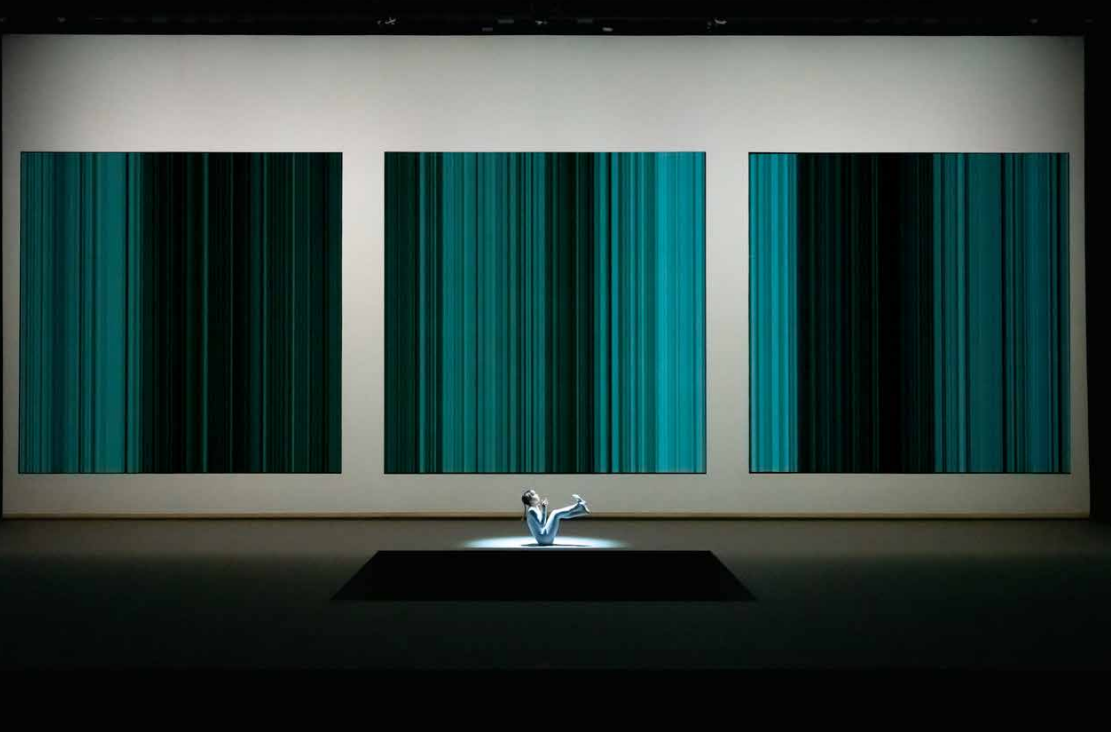
I am sure one can unearth many more accounts of this kind. What I could not find was any comprehensive study on the effect that the Spanish Influenza had on cultural activities during this time. From that standpoint, I believe recording a variety of reports on how the novel coronavirus has impacted cultural life is of great significance right now.

Note: This essay is a revised version of an essay that appeared in the December 2020 issue of *Tokyojin*, a journal issued by Toshishuppan, Inc. The text in square brackets in citations is added by the author.

Goto, Ryuki

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(Translation: Cody Poulton)



2020 Photo: Fukunaga Kazuo

Developments in Japan and Overseas

Plurality of Senses – for Dumb Type

Uchino Tadashi

It was a strange sensation that was both nostalgic and fresh. Perhaps that was because, despite a sense of *déjà vu*, it had been quite a while since so many sensations and thoughts had been evoked in the here and now of theatre, even though this was just a video image. It was a video screening of Dumb Type's new work, *2020*, which was to be performed in March 2020 but was canceled due to the spread of the novel coronavirus. It was a documentary

film edited from recordings made in a no-audience performance in March 2020; the video was then screened for the general public in the South Hall of Rhome Theatre Kyoto, the original site of the physical performance, from October 16 to 18, 2020.⁽¹⁾

Formed in 1984, Dumb Type is a loose artist collective that is frequently referenced in the context of contemporary art. In 2019, the thirty-fifth anniversary of its formation, the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo held an exhibition entitled “Dumb Type | Action + Reflection” (November 16, 2019 to February 16, 2020). In this exhibition, a large number of written materials, video materials, and installation works were displayed, making it an impressive retrospective. I was reminded that the last time a work was performed in a theatre as Dumb Type – categorized as a “performance” in *Dumb Type 1984 2019*⁽²⁾ – was *Voyage*, which premiered in 2002,⁽³⁾ eighteen years earlier. The members of Dumb Type are quite fluid, and each of them engages in other work as an individual artist. What is more important, however, is the well-known creative method of Dumb Type, that is, the method of creating works through consensus-building in a completely democratic fashion.

No matter what process is involved in the creation of a work of art, the audience is unable to evaluate it based on anything other than the “strength” of the finished work, and so they unconsciously assume a competitive power structure is necessary to make a group a group. In other words, they expect “strength” from the “authorship” that can be reduced to a single unique name. Dumb Type broke this “common sense.” Democratic collective creation tends

to be aspirational, but Dumb Type refuses to give up on it. With this in mind, I think we should appreciate with a strong sense of amazement the fact that a performance work like *2020*, which requires a fairly complex collective consensus, could still be created after a long gap of eighteen years.

The reason I am writing about such a visible topic is because I believe that the plurality of perceptions in *2020* should be the focus of our discussion. This plurality of senses is the opposite of the kind of plurality that cannot be reduced into a single “authorship” without diffusing its “strength.” Indeed, in the credits of *2020*, the names of the eighteen members of Dumb Type involved are listed in alphabetical order without any indication of their roles. The integrated yet plural totality of the performance is achieved and fostered by the individual contributions of each artist and disclosed through the performance.

2020 consists of seven scenes (called “chapters” in “Dumb Type 2020”)⁽⁴⁾. There is a square hole in the center of the stage (depending on the scene, the hole may look circular due to lighting effects) and a white screen behind it. Sometimes there are one or three black, almost square screens that look similar to the hole in the center, and various images are projected on them. Sometimes they are nautical charts, sometimes images from surveillance cameras. Or it could be live footage of the action happening on stage. For example, in Chapter 5, the following is used:

During a light prelude, two performers appear, and dance left and right away from each other. The shadows of the two performers are reflected on a screen behind, where their



silhouettes overlap, push away, and join hands. The two performers dance, as “L-O-V-E” by Nat King Cole plays. Words that begin with L, O, V, and E are projected on three screens behind them. (“Dumb Type 2020,” p. 24)

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Here, three screens come down in the middle of the performance, but in Chapter 6, where two people in swimsuits are lying down and communicating with the blinking of their eyes, the number of screens goes back to one.

Their faces are alternately projected on the screen behind as they start a conversation with a blink. Words of the conversation are projected on the screen, and gradually other words related to the meaning of their words are induced, as finally countless words fill up the space. Eventually, these words get masked and become unreadable. (Ibid.)

The phrase “countless words fill the space” refers to the way these words are projected as if they are floating on the entire stage

space, including the background screen as well as the square black screen.

And finally, in Chapter 7, there are three screens again.

In sync with the sound composed of sine waves, glitches, and white noise, countless English words float on the screen, virtualizing the invisible universe of words that fills this world. (Ibid.)

In the opening Chapter 1, the textbook cited was *First Lessons in Geography*, an American textbook written by James Monteith and published in 1856. The textbook asked, “What is Geography? What is the Earth? Where does the sun set?”⁽⁵⁾ The work begins with such macroscopic questions and perspectives and ends in Chapter 7 with an image that gives us a sense of scale, “the invisible universe of words that fills this world.”

A performer in white body tights lies beneath the screen, and a line of a light is scanning the body. As the sound surges, the movement accelerates and the heat increases. The image also quickly transitions to the movement of a city and a marine chart. In the silence that arrives shortly after, facing the question Where does the sun set?, that was asked 160 years ago at the start, she finds herself rotating backwards, and falls backwards into the hole. (Ibid.)

The performers who appeared on stage included Sunayama Norico, Tanaka Mayumi, Hirai Yuko, Yabuuchi Misako, Yamada Aoi, and Yamanaka Toru, all of whom have been involved with Dumb Type in various ways. In other words, there are participants from the very beginning, such as Yabuuchi, and some who are participating for the first time, like Aoi.



2020 Photo: Inoue Yoshikazu

Each chapter is placed between the “macro perspectives” and “sense of scale” of the opening and closing of the curtain. Chapter 1, with its sharp images that give the impression of a serious theme, performance space woven with light and the body, and loud sound, gives the audience an expectation of such an out-of-body experience. Then, a black screen, similar in shape to the hole, comes down on top of the *kurokos* who appear in the middle of the loud sounds and place chairs around the hole, and Chapter 2 begins.

In Chapter 2, the faceless, black-clad “powers that be” are contrasted with surveillance camera footage, which eventually converges on Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, and Donald Trump. As a result, the film seems to take on a rather simplistic political character, and a “meaningfulness” that could be simplistic in its own strange way.

In Chapter 3, the black-clad figures who seemed to be “powerful” take off their suits and “transform into colorful outfits” (ibid.).



2020 Photo: Inoue Yoshikazu



2020 Photo: Fukunaga Kazuo

Perhaps it is only here that the “macroscopic perspective” (the “surveillance state”!) seems to slowly but steadily transform into something more personal and intimate.

This is underscored by the solo gestures of the performers who have “transformed into colorful outfits,” while Yamanaka Toru appears and “plays” the role of a DJ in a rather comical scene with “the Conductor” (Tanaka), who decides when and how far

to play an analog record, shouting “Stop!” and “Go!” Nevertheless, the “colorfully dressed people” are still trapped under the control of “the Conductor.” This is because their bodies are moved by the musical works that are arbitrarily selected one after another, and they move their bodies to the music. Eventually, however, “the surface of record administered by the Conductor, becomes unplayable as it is gradually covered with masking tape, and finally turns into noise.” (ibid.). Yes, it is as if the dictatorial power itself has somehow been dissolved.

In Chapter 4, after all the participants from the previous

chapters had left, the only remaining performer (Yabuuchi) ran around the abyss and shouted the following words:

"If there was a bomb inside me,
I want to eat it again, digest it,
and flush it down a toilet!" "If
there was a rabbit inside me,
a gap would develop rapidly,
taking away the fun, so I want
to go back for a bit and run
with a turtle!" (Ibid.)

While occasionally stopping to drink water, a total of nine sentences, including the above, are shouted out at the top of their lungs in the form of "If there was . . . inside me, I want to . . .," without any indication of where these lines come from, but those of us who listen to these cries, which could be thematized as "hope for symbiosis," or at least me personally, feel that we have come into contact with a personal yet fundamental subject such as "human/humane existence." It is not a "body in crisis" or a "posthuman body," but a "body with the lived experience" or a "body of the concerned."

In Chapter 5, which I have already cited, two performers (Sunayama and Aoi) dance away from each other across the darkness of the hole to Nat King Cole's "L-O-V-E," and it is only their shadows that "overlap, push away, and join hands" (ibid.). This does



not last long, and as the music slows down to an extreme level, the lights begin to flicker violently, finally leading to darkness.

In Chapter 6, which I have already mentioned as well, a performer (Tanaka) in a swimsuit, who in a way suddenly seems to be marked by vulnerability – while at the same time evoking a sense of a “comfortable life,” such as a vacation – talks through a tin-can telephone. A second performer in a swimsuit (Yabuuchi) answers the call on the phone, climbing up a ladder over a hole in the stage. This can be understood as an attempt to create a dialogue through a new circuit of communication, the blink of an eye, on a personal level. From the communication between the two, “other words related to the meaning of their words are induced, as finally countless words fill up the space. Eventually, these words get masked and become unreadable” (ibid.).

Thus, after two chapters in which the attempt at communication seemed to end in failure, the final chapter, Chapter 7, arrives. Here, after a series of “competitions” between higher-order digital images and analog high-speed body movements (performed by Aoi), we finally get to the opening question (“Where does the sun set?”). In response to the same question as the one at the beginning of the piece, “she finds herself rotating backwards, and falls backwards into the hole” (ibid.).

As we have seen, *2020* makes various references to the contemporaneous state of “human/humane existence” while foregrounding the issues of technology and communication, which are becoming ever more radical. And as I have shown in my previous descriptions, in *Dumb Type*, not only is articulation a subject, the



process of articulation itself is also made a subject.

Of course, *Dumb Type* doesn't enforce anything. It does not send any didactic messages. It only brings us the various possibilities and impossibilities of communication through various "digital" and "analog" circuits. I have already called it "the plurality of senses"; how we react and respond to any of them, or not react and not respond to any of them, depends on the subjective desires of each audience.

- (1) The "documentary film" was later screened at the Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media (YCAM) and was also distributed free of charge via the Rhome Theatre Kyoto YouTube channel from December 25 to 28.
- (2) *Dumb Type 1984 2019* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha), 2019.
- (3) Of course, the work had been repeatedly performed, and according to the record in *Dumb Type 1984 2019*, the last time was in 2009.
- (4) "Dumb Type 2020." This commentary was written by Hashimoto

Yusuke, Chief Director of the Kyoto STEAM Executive Committee and Program Director of Rohm Theatre Kyoto, and Dumb Type for inclusion in “Kyoto STEAM – World Cultural Exchange Festival – 2020 Project Report” (p. 24). Dumb Type and Hashimoto Yusuke collaborated to write a commentary on each scene of *2020* in Japanese and English for inclusion in the report. Yoko Takatani of Dumb Type provided the text to me for this article. (It is now available online at https://kyoto-steam.com/img/download/2021/archive/report_2020_en.pdf.)

- (5) This book is still available and can be read online at Project Gutenberg and elsewhere.

Uchino, Tadashi

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(Translation: Uchino Tadashi)



Ah, Yes, but Still ... (2018) Theatre Office Natori © Sakauchi Futoshi

Developments in Japan and Overseas

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

Tanioka Takehiko

I had heard quite some time ago that he was in poor health, so the news wasn't totally unexpected. Still, it did come as a shock. There was a flood of obituaries when he died. This giant of Japanese theatre, who wrote as many as 144 plays over the course of his life, died on March 3, 2020, at the age of 82.

It is common knowledge by now that Betsuyaku began his career as a playwright writing under the powerful influence of Samuel Beckett. When critiquing his style, you could say it is an established gambit to begin by referencing Beckett's own work. But there have been so many studies of Betsuyaku's work along those lines that it would be difficult to say anything fresh about his work by simply comparing the two writers.

So here I would like to draw another line of inquiry. Besides Betsuyaku, there are plenty of other playwrights in the world who have come under Beckett's influence. Can we not shed some light on Betsuyaku's work from a slightly different angle, by comparing him with some of these other playwrights? Fortunately, in the modern British theatre I study, the works that can be said to be variations on *Waiting for Godot* are not rare, among them Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* and Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Taking these two plays as points of reference, I would like to show how Betsuyaku has skillfully assimilated Beckett so as to create his own inimitable style.

Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* was first staged in 1960. The play begins with two hit men, Ben and Gus, in the basement of a building, chatting about nothing in particular, like the weekend football game, while waiting for the order to do another "job." Midway through the play, the dumbwaiter, located in the wall behind them, suddenly starts to move. No doubt this basement room was once the kitchen of some restaurant. It's amusing to watch how the two of them run around flustered over orders for dishes to be delivered on the dumbwaiter. When Gus goes to the washroom, Ben finally

gets the order they were expecting. The curtain closes as we realize that the target for the job is in fact Gus, who had been opposed to carrying out the dumbwaiter's orders in the first place.

As is clear from this brief synopsis, while borrowing the premise of two men waiting for something from *Waiting for Godot*, Pinter has moved the setting to somewhere with a greater sense of reality. Whereas Beckett's stage directions note only "A country road. A tree," Pinter has situated his stage space into somewhere with a greater sense of specificity, true to the daily life of the contemporary English. In adding a greater sense of reality to the scene, the play's political import—workers who dare to stand up to the ruling class are crushed—comes into sharp focus. I would like to further point out that the relationship between Ben and Gus isn't the same, mutually supportive one we see in *Waiting for Godot*, but is built on a tension, an antagonism so strong that one character is ready to take the life of the other.

My other example is the 1966 play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, where Stoppard has reconstructed *Hamlet* out of a couple of minor characters from Shakespeare's play. Sent by Claudius to divine Hamlet's hidden intentions, the two courtiers who are outwitted by Hamlet and sent to their deaths in England instead become the heroes of this play. The two are unaware of the situation they're in; nor do they have the authority to order others around, so they can only stand idly by and watch things happen. In having no choice but to gamely wait things out, they are just like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. But, unlike *Godot*, where nothing of significance seems to happen, Hamlet's powerful



Betsuyaku Minoru (1937–2020)

drama unfolds around the two title characters. One could say that, where Pinter has injected a sense of everyday reality into the blank space that is Beckett's empty stage, Stoppard has inserted a fictive world from another play altogether.

In his debt to Beckett, Betsuyaku likes to use a device similar to Stoppard. The easiest illustration of this would be *Story of Two Knights Travelling around the Country* (*Shokoku o henreki suru futari no kishi*), a work Betsuyaku wrote for Nakamura Nobuo and Mitsuda Ken in 1987. As is obvious from the play's subtitle, "Taken from *Don Quixote*," it is based on Cervantes's novel, but Betsuyaku's intent wasn't really to stage an adaptation of this classic Western masterpiece. Aside from the two knights and their attendant squires, the disposition of stage characters and the plot of the play are totally removed from *Quixote*'s world. In effect, Betsuyaku places Godot's two tramps in a wasteland with a windmill.

In the closing scene, where only the two are left onstage, Knight 2 asks, “Is anyone coming to end our lives, then?” Knight 1 replies, “Wait ... ” One hears an echo to Beckett’s play in the pause that follows this line. Besides this work, Betsuyaku would frequently base his absurdist plays on literary works and fairy tales both ancient and modern, like *Snow White inside an Egg* (*Tamago no naka no Shirayukihime*, 1988), *The Wind Salesman* (*Kaze no serusuman*, 2009), and *Absurd: Yotsuya Ghost Story* (*Fujori: Yotsuya kaidan*, 2013). Stoppard certainly doesn’t have a monopoly on literary allusion. I am not aware of Betsuyaku ever making reference to Stoppard in his lifetime, but to the extent that the two both enjoyed playing intellectual riffs on older material, the two playwrights shared surprisingly similar dispositions.

But, when considering



Snow White inside an Egg (1988) Theatrical Group En
Photograph provided by Theatrical Group En



The Wind Salesman (2014) Tom Project © Shionoya Yasuhiro
First staged in 2009.

what is unique about Betsuyaku's dramaturgy, it may be more worthwhile to compare his method to Pinter's. Like Pinter, Betsuyaku forged a unique sensibility by fleshing out his work in real-world settings. In contrast to Pinter's policy of constructing dialogue that vividly captured the verbal tics and specificity of his characters, what gave Betsuyaku's plays the scent of life as it is lived was the superb skill of his actors.

In 1974 Betsuyaku wrote a work called *A Story Told in Numbers* (*Suji de kakareta monogatari*) for the Bungakuza theatre company. The play is based on an actual event, the mass suicides of a prewar cult called the Let's Die Group, but its construction displays the sort of twist that Betsuyaku was so good at. At each juncture in the play, a character called The Interpreter enters and provides a detailed commentary on the circumstances surrounding the event, while those who appear to be the cult members amuse themselves in completely irrelevant activities like playing with balloons. There's a scene in the play where they are all gathered together for a meal. Betsuyaku paid special attention when watching this scene being performed. In taking note of the exact timing of eating a pickle or drinking their miso soup, the act of eating was performed so naturally that an aura of reality emerged from an otherwise totally absurdist set of circumstances.

Drawing on a statement by Pinter that "the theatre is a large, energetic, public activity," Betsuyaku often said that in the act of making theatre the author is consciously responsible for no more than 20% of the product, the other 80% being an adherence to tradition. The act of writing for a playwright is something private, but

no matter how free or radical the methods he employs, as soon as the director and actors have brought the work to the stage, it becomes difficult to change the time-tested practice of theatre making in any substantial way. I

feel that, with the Bungakuza production, Betsuyaku discovered the richness inherent in the 80% of the theatre as a public activity that he couldn't revise.

Betsuyaku himself once related that, in contrast with the actors at the Haiyūza, who always asked questions about the script's theme on first reading, actors at the Bungakuza never asked about the theme. Bungakuza actors didn't start their rehearsals by trying to analyze the play's structure, but rather by doing exercises like "this is how you normally eat a pickle" or "you drink your miso soup normally this way" (Okamuro Minako and Umeyama Itsuki, eds., *Reconsidering the Underground Theatre of the 1960s* [*Rokujunendai engeki saiko*]). This "normally" was probably a judgment based on standards established by generations of actors in the Bungakuza theatre company. Aligning himself to this tradition of acting, which is based on what clearly cannot be verbally expressed, enriched the plays that Betsuyaku wrote. The Beckett-like dramaturgy he employed no longer appeared to be an imported product. We can probably say that, in his collaborations with the Bungakuza



Kanauchi Kikuo acts as The Interpreter.
A Story Told in Numbers (1974) Bungakuza theatre company Atelier
Photograph provided by Bungakuza theatre company

on such productions as *A Story Told in Numbers or Thirty Days Hath September* (*Nishi muku samurai*), Betsuyaku was able to plant absurdism in the soil of Japanese theatre and make it take root.

I would like to add a further point where Pinter and Betsuyaku are kindred spirits. Where Betsuyaku's first play *A and B and a Certain Woman* (*A to B to hitori no onna*, 1961) is more obviously influenced, not by Beckett, but by Edward Albee's *Zoo Story*, the

first time we encounter people like the two tramps in *Waiting for Godot* is in his play *Elephant (Zo)*, 1962). Two bystanders unrelated to the main plot of the play make an entrance. Though they are complete strangers to each other, Bystander 1 suddenly demands Bystander 2 strike him with his stick. While Bystander 2 is thoroughly non-plussed by this demand, Bystander 1 strikes and kills him with his own stick. He's of the opinion that if you don't want to get killed, you have to fight. Like Ben and Gus in Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*, Betsuyaku has put these two characters into a disquietening relationship where one is obliged to destroy the other. Both Pinter and Betsuyaku turn their



A and B and a Certain Woman (2007) SCOT
Photograph provided by SCOT

attention to situations where what is absurd frequently erupts into reality in the form of violence.

To follow this line of thinking I think we can safely say that Betsuyaku's work staged by Theatre Office Natori in 2018, *Ah, Yes, but Still ...* (*Aa, sore na no ni, sore na no ni*)

consummates Betsuyaku's career as a playwright. Here too, like Stoppard, Betsuyaku draws on another work for inspiration. As is evident from the play's subtitle, "A dumbwaiter with many orders," Betsuyaku is using the famous short story by Miyazawa Kenji, "Restaurant of Many Orders" ("Chumon no ooi ryoriten") as a kind of borrowed landscape into which he throws two men like the killers in *The Dumb Waiter*.

Betsuyaku took Vladimir and Estragon from *Waiting for Godot* to which he added a palpable sense of tension in the dynamic between his two bystanders in *Elephant*, but strangely one doesn't feel the same sort of apprehension in the two hit men in *Ah, Yes, but Still* While being aware that he is Man 2's next target, Man 1 tells him to make sure he does the job properly. He is calm in the face of death, no doubt because he has been told by his doctor that he has only another month to live. What's more, he believes that his voice will live on in the ears of the living after he dies. The play doesn't



make clear what he believes is true. But it would surely be no mistake to say that, this play included, Betsuyaku's work will continue to deliver its message to audiences long after his own death.

Tanioka, Takehiko

Born in 1965. Professor at the Institute for Liberal Arts at Tokyo Institute of Technology, specializing in contemporary British theatre. His publications include *Notes on Contemporary British Theatre* (*Gendai Igirisu engeki dansho*, Camomilesa). Responsible for the translation of David Greig's *The Events* for the New National Theatre of Tokyo, 2019. A member of the Association of Haiku Poets (*Haijin kyokai*), he is the author of the collection *Youthful Writings* (*Wakagaki*, Honami Syoten).

(Translation: Cody Poulton)

«Appendix» Translations and Overseas Presentations of Works by Betsuyaku Minoru

Compiled by the Editorial Team

● Translated Works

1979 *The Move*

Original title 移動 (Ido) Language English Translated title The Move Translator Ted T. Takaya
Included in Modern Japanese Drama: An Anthology (Modern Asian Literature Series)
Publisher Columbia University Press (USA)

1986 *The Elephant*

Original title 象 (Zo) Language English Translated title The Elephant Translator David G. Goodman
Included in After Apocalypse: Four Japanese Plays of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
Publisher Columbia University Press (USA)

1988 *Toilet This Way Please*

Original title トイレはこちら (Toire wa kochira) Language Russian
Translated title Сто йен за услугу Translator Татьяна Юрковой
Included in Современная драматургия, 1988, No.5
Publisher Союза театральных деятелей СССР (Russia)

1990 *The Story of the Two Knights Travelling Around the Country*

Original title 諸国を遍歴する二人の騎士の物語 (Shokoku wo henrekisuru futari no kishi no monogatari) Language English
Translated title The Story of the Two Knights Travelling Around the Country
Translator Masako Yuasa
Included in The Story of the Two Knights Travelling Around the Country
Publisher Leeds: Alumnus (UK)

1992 *The Little Match Girl*

Original title マッチ売りの少女 (Matchiuri no shojo) Language English
Translated title The Little Match Girl Translator Robert N. Lawson
Included in Alternative Japanese Drama: Ten Plays
Publisher University of Hawaii Press (USA)

The Legend of Noon

Original title 正午の伝説 (Shogo no densetsu) Language English
Translated title The Legend of Noon Translator Robert T. Rolf
Included in Alternative Japanese Drama: Ten Plays
Publisher University of Hawaii Press (USA)

The Cherry in Bloom

Original title 木に花咲く (Ki ni hana saku) Language English Translated title The Cherry in Bloom
 Translator Robert T. Rolf Included in Alternative Japanese Drama: Ten Plays
 Publisher University of Hawaii Press (USA)

1994 *The Elephant*

Original title 象 (Zo) Language English Translated title The Elephant Translator David G. Goodman
 Included in After Apocalypse: Four Japanese Plays of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
 Publisher East Asia Program, Cornell University (USA)

* Paperback version of the book with the same title published in 1986.

Toilet This Way Please

Original title トイレはこちら (Toire wa kochira) Language Chinese (Simplified)
 Translated title 廁在这儿 Translator 山崎理恵子 Included in 新剧本
 Publisher 北京市文化局新剧本编辑部 (China)

2001 *Toilet This Way Please*

Original title トイレはこちら (Toire wa kochira) Language Chinese (Traditional)
 Translated title 廁所在這裡 Translator 山崎理恵子 Included in 日本當代劇作選
 Publisher 唐山出版社 (Taiwan)

You Can Sleep Here

Original title 寝られます (Neraremasu) Language Chinese (Traditional)
 Translated title 可以睡覺 Translator 山崎理恵子 Included in 日本當代劇作選
 Publisher 唐山出版社 (Taiwan)

2002 *The Story of the Two Knights Travelling Around the Country*

Original title 諸国を遍歴する二人の騎士の物語 (Shokoku wo henrekisuru futari no kishi no monogatari) Language Russian
 Translated title История двух странствующих рыцарей
 Translator Синьити Мурата, Ларисы Жилиной
 Included in Сборник современных японских пьес, Книга 1
 Publisher Омский государственный университет (Russia)

2004 *Sick*

Original title 病気 (Byoki) Language English Translated title Sick Translator M. Cody Poulton
 Included in Half a Century of Japanese Theatre VI Publisher Kinokuniya Co. Ltd. (Japan)

2005 *The Story of the Two Knights Travelling Around the Country*

Original title 諸国を遍歴する二人の騎士の物語 (Shokoku wo henrekisuru futari no kishi no monogatari) Language Korean Translated title 세상을 편력하는 두 기사 이야기
 Translator 송선호 Included in 세상을 편력하는 두 기사 이야기 Publisher 성균관대학교출판부 (Korea)

2007 *Sick*

Original title 病気 (Byoki) Language Russian Translated title Болести Translator Мацукава Наоко
Included in Драми на углу улицы: японский театр абсурда
Publisher Три квадрата (Russia)

A Place and Memories

Original title 場所と思い出 (Basho to omoide) Language Russian
Translated title Места и воспоминания Translator Мацукава Наоко
Included in Драми на углу улицы: японский театр абсурда
Publisher Три квадрата (Russia)

2011 *Godot Has Come*

Original title やってきたゴドー (Yattekita godo) Language French Translated title Godot est arrivé
Translator Corinne Atlan Included in Recueil de pièces de théâtre japonaises
contemporaines traduites en français 3
Publisher Association japonaise des dramaturges (Japan)

2014 *The Little Match Girl*

Original title マッチ売りの少女 (Matchiuri no shoujo) Language English
Translated title The Little Match Girl Translator Robert N. Lawson
Included in The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Drama
Publisher Columbia University Press (USA)

2017 *The Information Desk*

Original title 受付 (Uketsuke) Language Chinese (Traditional) Translated title 掛號
Translator 山崎理恵子、林孟寰 Included in 掛號 Publisher 亞戲亞 (Taiwan)

2019 *Bubbling and Boiling*

Original title あーぶくたった、にいたった (Abukutatta, niitatta)
Language Chinese (Traditional) Translated title 起泡泡了 水滾滾了 Translator 山崎理恵子、鴻鴻
Included in アジア戯曲エクステンジ@2019 Publisher 亜細亜の骨 (Japan)

2020 *The Incident of the Salad Murder*

Original title さらだ殺人事件 (Sarada satsujin jiken) Language Chinese (Traditional)
Translated title 沙拉殺人事件 Translator 山崎理恵子 Included in 嘉義小劇場節 亞洲專題小冊
Publisher 阮劇團 (Taiwan)

● Overseas Presentations

1972 *Landscape with a Hospital*

Original title 病院のある風景 (Byoin no aru fukei) Translated title Landschaft mit Krankenhaus

Broadcast date Unknown Broadcast location Cologne (West Germany)

Translator Siegfried Schaarschmidt Director Hirano Atsuko

Organizer Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Köln

* Radio drama commissioned by NHK (First aired on October 3 1970, NHK FM)

1987 *Kangaroo*

Original title カンガルー (Kangaru) Translated title Kangaroo Date December 1–4

Venue Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds Location Leeds (UK)

Translation Yuasa Masako Director Yuasa Masako

Organizer Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds

1988 *I Am the Father of the Genius Idiot Bakabon*

Original title 天才バカボンのパパなのだ (Tensai bakabon no papa nanoda)

Translated title I Am the Father of the Genius Idiot Bakabon Date November 8–12

Venue Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds Location Leeds (UK)

Translator Yuasa Masako Director Yuasa Masako

Organizer Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds

1989 *A Corpse with Feet*

Original title 足のある死体 (Ashi no aru shitai) Translated title A Corpse with Feet

Date June 13–16 Venue Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds

Location Leeds (UK) Translator Yuasa Masako Director Yuasa Masako

Organizer Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds

1990 *The Story of the Two Knights Travelling Around the Country*

Original title 諸国を遍歴する二人の騎士の物語 (Shokoku wo henrekisuru futari no kishi no monogatari)

Translated title The Story of the Two Knights Travelling Around the Country

Date November 27–December 1 Venue Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds

Location Leeds (UK) Translator Yuasa Masako Director Yuasa Masako

Organizer Workshop Theatre, University of Leeds

1991 *Toilet This Way Please*

Original title トイレはこちら (Toire wa kochira) Translated title Сто йен за услугу

Date December 24–25 Venue Theater Miniatures "Experiment"

Location St. Petersburg (Russia) Translator Tatiana Yurkova

Director Horiguchi Hajime (Theatre Seinen Gekijo)

Organizer Theater Miniatures "Experiment"

1992 *The Elephant*

Original title 象 (Zo) Translated title The Elephant Date July 28–August 16
Venue New End Theatre Location London (UK) Translator David G. Goodman
Director Tim Keenan Organizer Wave Theatre Company

1993 *A Corpse with Feet*

Original title 足のある死体 (Ashi no aru shitai) Translated title A Corpse with Feet
Date January 4–17 Venue Buzz Goodbody Studio, The Other Place
Location Stratford-upon-Avon (UK) Translator Yuasa Masako Director Ron Cook
Organizer Royal Shakespeare Company

1998 *Toilet This Way Please*

Original title トイレはこちら (Toire wa kochira) Translated title 廁所在這兒 Date July 17–19
Venue China National Experimental Theatre Location Beijing (China)
Translator Yamazaki Rieko Director Wu Xiaojiang
Organizer Committee for Promoting Performances of Works by Betsuyaku Minoru
(a group of Japanese study-abroad students at the Central Academy of Drama)

You Can Sleep Here

Original title 寝られます (Neraremasu) Translated title 可以睡覺 Date July 17–19
Venue China National Experimental Theatre Location Beijing (China)
Translator Yamazaki Rieko Director Bokuda Hitomi
Organizer Committee for Promoting Performances of Works by Betsuyaku Minoru
(a group of Japanese study-abroad students at the Central Academy of Drama)

1999 *Toilet This Way Please*

Original title トイレはこちら (Toire wa kochira) Translated title 廁所在這兒 Date June 19–22
Venue Fringe Theatre, Fringe Club Location Hong Kong (China)
Translator Yamazaki Rieko Director Wu Xiaojiang
Organizer Committee for Promoting Performances of Works by Betsuyaku Minoru
(a group of Japanese study-abroad students at the Central Academy of Drama)

2001 *Toilet This Way Please*

Original title トイレはこちら (Toire wa kochira) Translated title 撒尿的代價 Date February 1–5
Venue McAulay Studio, Hong Kong Arts Centre Location Hong Kong (China)
Translator Yamazaki Rieko Director Ho Ying-Fung Organizer Theatre Fanatico

2002 *The Information Desk*

Original title 受付 (Uketsuke) Translated title 痴痴呆呆坐埋一台 Date August 28–31
Venue Fringe Theatre, Fringe Club Location Hong Kong (China)
Translator Yamazaki Rieko Director Tsang Man-Tung Organizer Thunderous Firework

2003 *Peter Pan, Kidnapping*

Original title さらっていつてよピーターパン (Saratte itte yo pitapan)

Translated title Can you still fly, Peter Pan? Date August 1–2

Venue Bagley Wright Theatre Location Seattle (USA)

Director Ishimoto Koji Organizer Piccolo Theatre Company of Hyogo Prefecture

2005 *The Story of the Two Knights Travelling Around the Country*

Original title 諸国を遍歴する二人の騎士の物語 (Shokoku wo henrekisuru futari no kishi no monogatari) Translated title 세상을 편력하는 두 기사 이야기; 돈키호테로부터

Date March 24–April 10

Venue Small Art Theater, Korean Culture and Arts Foundation

Location Seoul (Korea) Translator Song Son-Ho Director Song Son-Ho

Organizer/Company Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, Cultizen

The Cherry in Bloom

Original title 木に花咲く (Ki ni hana saku) Translated title 나무에 꽃 피다 Date November 17–20

Venue National Theater of Korea Location Seoul (Korea) Translator Ishikawa Juri

Director Lee Yountaek

Organizer/Company Yeonhuidan Georipae, Korea-Japan Theatre Exchange Council

* Staged reading

A Scene with a Red Bird

Original title 赤い鳥の居る風景 (Akai tori no iru fukei) Translated title 빨간 새가 있는 풍경

Date December 2–4 Venue Munhwa Ilbo Hall Location Seoul (Korea)

Simultaneous interpreter Myung Jin-sook Director Kiyama Kiyoshi

Organizer Kiyama Theatre Productions

2006 *The Incident of the Salad Murder*

Original title さらだ殺人事件 (Sarada satsujin jiken)

Translated title 沙律殺人事件

Date January 12–15

Venue McAulay Studio, Hong Kong Arts Centre

Location Hong Kong (China)

Translator Yamazaki Rieko, Vee Leong

Director E-RUN

Organizer office30



Photo: Cheung Chi Wai

A Small House and Five Gentlemen

Original title 小さな家と五人の紳士 (Chiisana ie to gonin no shinshi)

Translated title Une petite maison et cinq gentilhommes Date July 7–29 (odd days)

Venue Théâtre le Funambule Location Avignon (France)

Director Emoto Akira Organizer Company Tokyo Kandenchi

A Scene with a Red Bird

Original title 赤い鳥の居る風景 (Akai tori no iru fukei) Translated title A Scene with a Red Bird
Date October 13–15 Venue American Theatre of Actors Location New York (USA)
Simultaneous interpreter Takase Kazuki Director K. Kiyama (Kiyama Kiyoshi)
Organizer Kiyama Theatre Productions

Alice in Wonderland's Mad Hatter's Tea Party

Original title 不思議の国のアリスの帽子屋さんのお茶の会 (Fushigi no kuni no arisu no boshiyasan no ocha no kai) Translated title The Hatter's Tea-Party
Date October 14–15 Venue The Lady Wardle Performing Arts Centre
Location Perth (Australia) Director Hirai Kumiko
Organizer Piccolo Theatre Company of Hyogo Prefecture

2007 *A Place and Memories*

Original title 場所と思い出 (Basho to omoide)
Translated title Места и воспоминания
Date July 9–10
Venue Meyerhold Theatre Centre
Location Moscow (Russia)
Director Matsumoto Osamu
Organizer Piccolo Theatre Company of Hyogo Prefecture



Photo provided by the Piccolo Theatre Company of Hyogo Prefecture

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Toilet This Way Please

Original title トイレはこちら (Toire wa kochira) Translated title 廁所在這裡 Date July 17–19
Venue To Kwa Wan E-Rehearsal Space Location Hong Kong (China)
Translator Yamazaki Rieko Director E-RUN Organizer office30

Bubbling and Boiling

Original title あーぶくたった、にいたった (Abukutatta, niitatta) Translated title 泡泡起了 滾滾水了
Date November 7 Venue To Kwa Wan E-Rehearsal Space Location Hong Kong (China)
Translator Yamazaki Rieko Director Chan Ming-Fung Organizer office30
* Staged reading

The Information Desk

Original title 受付 (Uketsuke) Translated title 掛號 Date November 14
Venue To Kwa Wan E-Rehearsal Space Location Hong Kong (China)
Translator Yamazaki Rieko Director Chen Kuan-Hao Organizer office30
* Staged reading

Toilet This Way Please

Original title トイレはこちら (Toire wa kochira) Translated title 廁所在這裡

Date November 23–24 Venue To Kwa Wan E-Rehearsal Space

Location Hong Kong (China) Translator Yamazaki Rieko

Director Chen Kang Organizer office30

* Staged reading

2008 Giovanni's Journey to His Father

Original title ジョバンニの父への旅 (Jobanni no chichi eno tabi)

Translated title 죠반니-죠반니의 아버지로 가는 여행 Date October 7–November 2

Venue Sanwoolim Theater Location Seoul (Korea)

Translator Kimura Noriko, Sung Kiwoong Director Kim Kwang-Bo

Organizer / Company Theatre Company Chungwoo, Sanwoolim Theater, Moa Entertainment

You Can Sleep Here

Original title 寝られます (Neraremasu) Translated title 可以睡覺 Date October 21–23

Venue Experimental Theatre, Department of Drama, National Taiwan University of Arts

Location Taipei (Taiwan) Translator Yamazaki Rieko Director Wang Zhi-Ren

Organizer Department of Drama, National Taiwan University of Arts

2010 You Can Sleep Here

Original title 寝られます (Neraremasu) Translated title 可以睡覺 Date April 10–12

Venue Multifunctional Theater, Rongyu Campus D203 Location Tainan (Taiwan)

Translator Yamazaki Rieko Director Weng Yumei

Organizer Department of Drama Creation and Application, National University of Tainan

Sick

Original title 病気 (Byoki) Translated title La Maladie Date May 28–29

Venue Maison de la culture du Japon Location Paris (France)

Subtitles translator Oku Kaori Director K. Kiyama Organizer Theatre Office Natori

Sick

Original title 病気 (Byoki) Translated title Больной Date May 22–23

Venue Near the House of Stanislavsky Theatre Location Moscow (Russia)

Subtitles translator Omori Masako Director K. Kiyama Organizer Theatre Office Natori

You Can Sleep Here

Original title 寝られます (Neraremasu) Translated title 可以睡覺 Date July 16–31

Venue Star Theatres Location Beijing (China) Translator Yamazaki Rieko et al.

Director Zhao Rui-Ning Organizer Star Theatres

2012 *Godot Has Come*

Original title やってきたゴドー (Yattekita godo)

Translated title Voilà Godot!

Date December 14–15

Venue Maison de la culture du Japon

Location Paris (France)

Subtitles translator Oku Kaori Director K. Kiyama

Organizer Theatre Office Natori



Photo: Matsumoto Kazuyuki

Godot Has Come

Original title やってきたゴドー (Yattekita godo)

Translated title Godot has come (Yattekita Godot) Date December 19–20

Venue Deutsches Theater Berlin Location Berlin (Germany) Subtitles translator Saito Taro

Director K. Kiyama Organizer Theatre Office Natori

2013 *You Can Sleep Here*

Original title 寝られます (Neraremasu) Translated title 可以睡覺 Date August 23–25

Venue Guling Street Avant-Garde Theatre Location Taipei (Taiwan)

Translator Yamazaki Rieko et al. Director Hu Tzu-Yun

Organizer Wonder Taiwan Theatre Company

You Can Sleep Here

Original title 寝られます (Neraremasu) Translated title 可以睡覺 Date September 27–28

Venue Tainaner Drama Garden Location Tainan (Taiwan) Translator Yamazaki Rieko et al.

Director Hu Tzu-Yun Organizer Wonder Taiwan Theatre Company

2014 *Godot Has Come*

Original title やってきたゴドー (Yattekita godo) Translated title Godot has come

Date February 14–15 Venue Samuel Beckett Theatre Location Dublin (Ireland)

Subtitles translator Hori Mariko Director K. Kiyama (Assistant Director: Ogasawara Kyo)

Organizer Theatre Office Natori

Godot Has Come

Original title やってきたゴドー (Yattekita godo) Translated title Godot has come

Date February 19–20 Venue Granary Theatre Location Cork (Ireland)

Subtitles translator Hori Mariko Director K. Kiyama (Assistant Director: Ogasawara Kyo)

Organizer Theatre Office Natori

Godot Has Come

Original title やってきたゴドー (Yattekita godo) Translated title Годо пришёл

Date February 25–26 Venue Near the House of Stanislavsky Theatre

Location Moscow (Russia) Subtitles translator Omori Masako Director K. Kiyama

(Assistant Director: Ogasawara Kyo) Organizer Theatre Office Natori

Godot Has Come

Original title やってきたゴドー (Yattekita godo) Translated title Iață-I pe Godot Date June 5
 Venue Teatrul Național Eugene Ionesco Location Chișinău (Moldova)
 Subtitles translator Ramona Taranu (Romanian), Omori Masako (Russian)
 Director K. Kiyama (Assistant Director: Ogasawara Kyo) Organizer Theatre Office Natori

Godot Has Come

Original title やってきたゴドー (Yattekita godo)
 Translated title Iață-I pe Godot! (Godot Has Come!) Date June 8
 Venue Colegiu Național Octavian Goga Location Sibiu (Romania)
 Subtitles translator Ramona Taranu (Romanian), Hori Mariko (English)
 Director K. Kiyama (Assistant Director: Ogasawara Kyo) Organizer Theatre Office Natori

Godot Has Come

Original title やってきたゴドー (Yattekita godo)
 Translated title Iață-I pe Godot! (Godot Has Come!) Date June 12
 Venue Teatrul Odeon Location Bucharest (Romania) Subtitles translator Ramona Taranu
 Director K. Kiyama (Assistant Director: Ogasawara Kyo) Organizer Theatre Office Natori

Toilet This Way Please

Original title トイレはこちら (Toire wa kochira) Translated title Сто йен за услугу
 Date July 5, 19 Venue Odessa Regional Puppet Theater Location Odessa (Ukraine)
 Translator Tatiana Yurkova Director Gennady Skarga
 Organizer Odessa Regional Puppet Theater

2016 Broken Scenery

Original title 壊れた風景 (Kowareta Fukei)
 Translated title 일그러진 풍경
 Date April 5–10
 Venue Mary Hall Small Theater,
 Sogang University
 Location Seoul (Korea)
 Translator Jeong Sang-Mi
 Director Bam Moo-Sub
 Organizer The 30th Anniversary Project of
 the Troupe Small Mythology



Photo provided by Troupe Small Mythology

Broken Scenery

Original title 壊れた風景 (Kowareta Fukei) Translated title 일그러진 풍경 Date July 21–28
 Venue Hyehwa-dong Small Theater Location Seoul (Korea)
 Translator Jeong Sang-Mi Director Bam Moo-Sub
 Organizer Korea-Japan Theater Exchange Festival of Hyehwa-dong Small Theater

I Am Not the Person

Original title その人ではありません (Sonohito dewa arimasen)

Translated title I am not the person Date October 24

Venue Abhimanch, National School of Drama Location New Delhi (India)

Translator Miyazaki Masako, Jason Arcari Director Miyazaki Masako, Jason Arcari

Organizer Asia Pacific Bureau Theatre Schools Festival, Toho Gakuen College of Drama and Music

The Elephant

Original title 象 (Zo) Translated title 코끼리 Date November 3–13

Venue Theater Laboratory Hyehwa-dong No. 1 Location Seoul (Korea)

Translator Jeong Sang-Mi Director Khoo Jahye

Organizer Autumn Festival "Green Theater" of Theater Laboratory Hyehwa-dong No. 1

2017 The Information Desk

Original title 受付 (Uketsuke) Translated title 掛號 Date August 26–27

Venue Taipei Community Building Center (Union Hospital) Location Taipei (Taiwan)

Translator Yamazaki Rieko, Lin Meng-huan Director Peng Hao-Chin Organizer Asian Rib

* Staged reading

The Information Desk

Original title 受付 (Uketsuke) Translated title 掛號 Date August 31–September 1

Venue Woolloomooloo西門店WOW Location Taipei (Taiwan)

Translator Yamazaki Rieko, Lin Meng-huan Director Peng Hao-Chin Organizer Asian Rib

* Staged reading

Godot Has Come

Original title やってきたゴドー (Yattekita godo) Translated title Godot Has Come / Voilà Godot

Date November 28–December 2 Venue Espace Knox, Infinithéâtre

Location Montreal (Canada) Subtitles translator Hori Mariko (English), Infinithéâtre (French)

Director K. Kiyama (Assistant Director: Ogasawara Kyo) Organizer Theatre Office Natori

Godot Has Come

Original title やってきたゴドー (Yattekita godo) Translated title Godot Has Come

Date December 5–6 Venue Stoll Thrust Theatre, University of Minnesota

Location Minneapolis (USA) Subtitles translator Hori Mariko

Director K. Kiyama (Assistant Director: Ogasawara Kyo) Organizer Theatre Office Natori

Godot Has Come

Original title やってきたゴドー (Yattekita godo) Translated title Godot Has Come

Date December 9 Venue Factory Theatre Location Toronto (Canada)

Subtitles translator Hori Mariko Director K. Kiyama (Assistant Director: Ogasawara Kyo)

Organizer Theatre Office Natori

2018 *The Elephant*

Original title 象 (Zo) Translated title слон Date June 2–3
 Venue Tovstonogov Bolshoi Drama Theater Location St. Petersburg (Russia)
 Subtitles translator Sato Takayuki Director Manabe Takashi Organizer Theatre Office Natori

The Elephant

Original title 象 (Zo) Translated title слон Date June 6–7
 Venue Satirikon Arkady Raikin Russian State Theatre Location Moscow (Russia)
 Subtitles translator Sato Takayuki Director Manabe Takashi Organizer Theatre Office Natori

The Elephant

Original title 象 (Zo) Translated title Elefantul / Az elefánt Date June 12–13
 Venue Sala Studio, Teatrul Maghiar de Stat Cluj Location Cluj-Napoca (Romania)
 Subtitles translator Mihai Popa Director Manabe Takashi Organizer Theatre Office Natori

2019 *Bubbling and Boiling*

Original title あーぶくたった、にいたった (Abukutatta, niitatta) Translated title 滾湯冒泡煮鍋鍋
 Date August 16, 18 Venue Moon Romantic Taipei Location Taipei (Taiwan)
 Translator Yamazaki Rieko, Hung Hung Director Huang Yu-Ching
 Organizer Dark Eyes Performance Lab
 * Staged reading

Bubbling and Boiling

Original title あーぶくたった、にいたった (Abukutatta, niitatta) Translated title 滾湯冒泡煮鍋鍋
 Date October 18–19 Venue Chiayi Performing Arts Center Location Chiayi (Taiwan)
 Translator Yamazaki Rieko, Hung Hung Director Huang Yu-Ching Organizer Our theater
 * Staged reading

2020 *The Incident of the Salad Murder*

Original title さらだ殺人事件 (Sarada satsujin jiken) Translated title 沙拉殺人事件
 Date October 17–18 Venue Chiayi Performing Arts Center Location Chiayi (Taiwan)
 Translator Yamazaki Rieko Director Chen Ya-Rou Organizer Our theater
 * Staged reading

- This list was created based on archive searches of the National Diet Library and other libraries, information provided by the various hosting organizations, Yoichi Uchida's *Kaze no engeki: Hyoden Betsuyaku Minoru (Theater of the Wind: An Autobiography of Betsuyaku Minoru, 2018, Hakusuisha)* and other related works, and information found on the internet.
- If any readers are aware of translations or overseas presentations of works by Betsuyaku Minoru not included in this list, please contact the Japanese Centre of International Theatre Institute (mail@iti-j.org).



SPECIAL FEATURE “Theatre Born in Conflict Zones 12”





From *The Murder of Isaac* (from the left: Konno Kenta, Fujii Bin)

Special Feature

Theatre Born in Conflict Zones 12

A Staged Reading Performed Full Out

Kono Takashi

The Murder of Isaac (Isaac is pronounced “Izhak” in Hebrew), written by Israeli playwright Motti Lerner, is the dramatization of a terrorist incident: the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin (1922–1995), who twice served as Israel’s prime minister and was still in office when he was murdered.

Lerner was born in 1949, and in most of his plays, he deals with

political and moral issues related to Israel and the Jewish people.

He wrote *The Murder of Isaac* in 1998. In December 2020, it was presented as a dramatic reading in Japanese at Atelier West of Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre in Ikebukuro, Tokyo. The play was translated by Murai Hanayo and directed by Kobayashi Nanao of Ryuzanji Company. The reading was performed three times. It was also recorded and streamed for a charge.

The play is set at a state-run PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) rehabilitation centre under the auspices of Israeli Ministry of Defense. One early evening in 1998, the patients perform their own play before their family members, the centre's staff, and other patients. The play they present is about the assassination of Rabin, Israel's former prime minister.

From the context, those who are well-acquainted with theatre might recall *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* (*Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean Paul Marats dargestellt durch die Schauspielgruppe des Hospizes zu Charenton unter Anleitung des Herrn de Sade*) (usually shortened to *Marat/Sade*), which is a play written in 1964 by the German playwright Peter Weiss. For this reason, *The Murder of Isaac* is referred to as the Israeli version of *Marat/Sade*.

As a side note, the Russian company Taganka Theatre's production of *Marat/Sade* directed by Yuri Lyubimov was presented in Japan back in 2002 at Shizuoka Arts Theatre and it was truly outstanding.

On November 4, 1995, then prime minister Rabin was shot to death in front of citizens attending a peace rally. He was killed by Yigal Amir, a twenty-five-year-old right-wing extremist, who believed in far-right Jewish Orthodoxy and opposed the peace plan with Palestine (he was sentenced to life and is still in prison). The incident occurred just when Israel and Palestine had signed the Oslo Accords, and people thought that the long-awaited peace would finally come.

Let us look back on the process that led to the Oslo Accords. The Labor Party won the 1992 general elections and Rabin became Israel's eleventh prime minister. From 1993, Rabin began secret negotiations with the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) in Oslo through the mediation of Norway's foreign minister Johan Holst, who had been his long-held close associate.

As a result, both sides agreed to accept the other as negotiating partner, upon which US President Clinton admitted PLO as the one and only legal representative of Palestine, and in September 1993, at the White House in Washington DC, Prime Minister Rabin and Yasser Arafat, the Chairman of the PLO, signed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. From then on, "Oslo Accords" became the conventional name for the peace process, as the agreements were reached through negotiations in Oslo.

Why did this tragic assassination occur? Binder, a retired veteran, wrote the play-within-a-play and directs the group of patients. He also plays the role of Rabin. He is tossed around by the patients,

who keep on changing the contents of the play without his permission, but after going through twists and turns, he manages to get things going.

The profiles of the inmates make it obvious that Israel is a war-torn region.

Binder is set as a sixty-seven-year-old man. He was injured in the War of Independence in 1948 (the First Arab-Israeli War) and had his leg amputated. He is constantly suffering from severe anxiety, thinking that someone is trying to assassinate him. Nevertheless, he has maintained his intellectual capacity, and the other patients respect him and accept his leadership role.

Rabin's Wife is played by a sixty-seven year old widow called Lola, whose two sons died in the Yom Kippur War of 1973 (the Fourth Arab-Israeli War). Later on, her husband also died, and she began volunteering as a dormitory matron at the rehabilitation centre.

The fifty-three-year-old Natan is blind. In 1973, he was injured in a bombing while serving in a home front unit, and he has been at the centre for twenty-five years. In the



Binder (Fujii Bin)



Lola (Inoue Kanako)



Natan (Ueda Kazuhiro)



Avner (Tsuji Kyota), Talia (Yamazaki Kaoru)



Yigal (Konno Kenta)

play-within-a-play, he plays the Head of the Security Services and a Bereaved Father.

Avner is thirty-five years old and is wheelchair-bound. He was a military medic in an infantry unit. He started suffering from PTSD due to air strikes during the 1982 Operation Peace for Galilee (the Lebanese Civil War). He is constantly dozing in order to cope with severe anxiety. He plays the Attorney General, a Mourner, and a Poet.

The Prime Minister's Murderer is played by Yigal, who has the same name as the young man who killed Prime Minister Rabin. In 1988, he was injured by a roadside bomb in Lebanon and came to the rehabilitation centre. Since then, he has become more religious, but at the same time, he is filled with anxiety that God might abandon him. Yigal feels hostile toward Binder, who is an atheist, thinking that Binder looks

down on him. Yigal is wearing a yarmulke (the Yiddish word for the plate-like cap worn by Jewish men; it is called a "kippah" in Hebrew)

and carries around a prop gun.

Mendel is a fifty-five-year-old ex-colonel in the Armored Corps. He performs the parts of an Activist in the ruling National Party and a Settler. He was taken prisoner and tortured in the 1973 war but was released after becoming seriously disabled, both physically and mentally. He has been staying at the centre since 1974 and has not been in touch with his family for years.

Eliahu, playing the part of a Settler Rabbi, is an ultra-Orthodox Jew. He served in a special unit, working as a gravedigger, and was in charge of looking for severed body parts of the casualties of war and terrorist attacks. However, he was affected by a terrorist attack himself and has been staying at the centre since 1996, suffering from the psychological trauma.

Yuda is fifty-one years old. He was injured in the Battle for Jerusalem during the 1967 Six-Day War (the Third Arab-Israeli War)



From the left: Avi (Yamashita Naoya) and Mendel (Sato Masahiro)



Eliahu (Katsumata Minoru)



Yuda (Ito Toshihiko)



Shulamit (Araki Rie)



Boris (Hayashi Hideki)

and is suffering from PTSD. He plays the Leader of the Opposition. He is a ladies' man, who gets very scared whenever he hears people weeping or shouting. He is considered a dangerous patient and cannot be allowed to go out.

There are also other patients who are from different backgrounds, representing each stratum of the Israeli society. One of them is Shulamit, playing a Settler. She has fallen mentally ill because her husband and children were killed by terrorists. There is also Boris, who is an immigrant from Russia working as a guard at the centre.

The patients are gnawed by anxiety, each in their own way, and on many occasions, the play-within-a-play is suspended when they become overwhelmed with anxiety. However, when they go off course due to problems and interruptions, the situation actually becomes quite comical, thereby creating an ironic effect.

At the end, Yigal grabs a handgun from the guard Boris and shoots Binder with real bullets. The curtain falls when the play-within-a-play and reality overlap.

For extreme Jewish fundamentalists, Rabin was nothing but a traitor who ceded the Promised Land to the Gentiles. Some ultra-Orthodox Jews do not acknowledge the founding of the state of Israel, based on their belief that Israel should be founded again with the arrival of the Messiah – not through man's own judgment. As some of its people do not recognize the establishment of the State of Israel, it makes it difficult to control them by Israeli law.

The ultra-Orthodox Jews have a high birthrate for reasons related to their beliefs, and the number of believers in Israel is increasing. According to a 2020 survey conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute, believers of ultra-Orthodox Judaism now constitute 13% of the population (approximately 1.1 million people).

The staged reading was presented during the pandemic, when the reported number of COVID-19 cases was rapidly increasing in Japan. The venue was a long, narrow room, and a transparent vinyl curtain was hung between the performers and the audience to separate the space. There was also an interval to provide ventilation during the performance.

The cast of the reading consisted of capable actors: Fujii Bin (playing Binder), Inoue Kanako (Lola), Sato Masahiro (Mendel), Tsuji Kyota (Avner), and others. It was not merely a reading; the actors moved around and performed at energy levels that could be upgraded to a full-scale production. It was written in the script that the character of Talia, an ex-opera singer who had serious burns, exposed parts of her body from time to time, and the actress Yamazaki Kaoru played those moments symbolically and sensually.

As the Japanese audience would not be familiar with the characters in the play performed by the patients, each actor wore a card indicating which part they were playing.

The music played in the reading was composed by Suwa So of Ryu-zanji Company and was of high quality. Some of the songs sung in the play sounded Brechtian.

Soon after the show starts, Lola, the dormitory matron, starts conducting the patients to have them sing in chorus. They sang: “We are the living dead / Faces that are invisible / From the war of forty-eight, from the war of fifty-six / We’re all afraid of death, but more terrified of living . . .” (from the script). These lyrics probably explain the feelings of the people of Israel, a state where war and terror never cease.

There was an interesting play on words—“peace” and “piss”. Binder (Rabin), who is trying to achieve peace, greets Rabbi and says, “Peace unto you.” The word “peace” sounds like “piss” when it is pronounced with a Yiddish accent. In the eyes of the dogmatic ultra-right Jewish people, peace may appear to be piss.

The playwright specifies how the play should be performed: “The show needs a stylized theatrical language which will enable the actors to expose the inner worlds of the characters in their full dimensions.”

In the staged reading, the agonies, anxieties, conflicts, hatred, and other inner emotions were expressed full out through the way the actors delivered their lines, which was as powerful as if it were



The chorus scene

a fully staged production. I look forward to seeing the play developed into a full version using a set.

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By the title, you may notice that this play actually has another hidden structure. It is the “Sacrifice of Isaac” in the Book of Genesis.

The name Izhak (Isaac) means “he laughs,” and it is based on Abraham, aged as he was, laughing in the back of his mind when he thought about whether it was possible for himself and Sarah to have a child. Their child was given exactly the name that God, Yahweh, had ordered.

However, one day, a messenger of God appears in front of Abraham and says to him, “Take your son Isaac to the land of Moriah and sacrifice him to me up in the mountain there.” Abraham does what God told him to do, takes his son there, and is about to sacrifice him.

At that moment, God sends a messenger again and stops

Abraham, saying, “Do not kill Isaac.” God had tested Abraham to see whether he would obey God’s words, and because he did obey, God made Abraham the forefather of many tribes. Yahweh ordered Abraham to sacrifice a lamb instead of his son. Isaac lived until he was 180 years old.

Prime Minister Rabin was killed despite the origin and history of his first name Yitzhak, and in a way, his assassination was an incident against the will of God who had intended to keep Isaac/Izhak alive.

What Yigal did was a human act defying God. The assassin Yigal is a descendant of Cain, who is mankind’s first murderer. Prime Minister Rabin, who was murdered, can also be regarded as a Christlike figure who was sacrificed to atone for humankind’s sins.

At any rate, to perform “the assassination of Rabin” as a play within a play gets Israel’s national pathology out on the table. The play was premiered in Germany in 1999 and also performed in the United States, where it got great responses. However, in Israel, it has not been fully staged at a professional theatre yet due to the politically and morally evocative nature of the content, which is understandable. In other words, it is a controversial play that is likely to arouse strong criticism.

Kono, Takashi

Born in Tokyo in 1950. He graduated from the Arabic Language department of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in 1974 and joined *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*. After working as a foreign correspondent in Tehran, Cairo, and London, he was assigned to the Cultural Affairs Division of the Tokyo Head Office in 1995 and worked there as a member of the editorial board (in charge of religion and theatre). He left the company in 2015 and has been writing articles for newspapers, magazines, and websites as a theatre critic and cultural journalist.

(Translation: Sumida Michiyo)

Photos: Ishizawa Chieko (including the photographs on page 201)

About the “Theatre Born in Conflict Zones” series

The centres of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) around the world have been carrying out projects called “Theatre Born in Conflict Zones” as an attempt to foster 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 process for the publication of the Theatre Yearbook. The series has continued for twelve years, and twenty-seven prominent plays not yet known in Japan have been introduced through translation, reading performances, lectures given by the authors and experts, exhibitions, and so on. The plays have been published since the third year of the series.

If you wish to get hold of either the latest issue of the Theatre Yearbook, which comes with the Japanese translation of *The Murder of Isaac*, and/or back issues, please contact the Japanese Centre of ITI. Furthermore, a report on Israeli theatre written by Professor Murai Hanayo, the translator of *The Murder of Isaac*, appears on pages 78–88 in *Theatre Yearbook 2020: Theatre Abroad*, published last year. We hope you have a chance to read through it.

Performance Record

"Theatre Born in Conflict Zones 12"

The Reading of *The Murder of Isaac*

December 11 (Fri) – 13 (Sun), 2020

Venue: Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre Atelier West (B1)

*Pre-recorded streaming (paid): December 18 (Fri) 10:00 –
December 24 (Thu) 23:59, 2020

Written by Motti Lerner

Translated by Murai Hanayo

Directed by Kobayashi Nanao (Ryuzanji Company)

The Cast: Fujii Bin (WonderPro), Inoue Kanako (Aru Company), Ueda Kazuhiro (Ryuzanji Company), Tsuji Kyota (infini), Yamazaki Kaoru (J.CLIP), Ito Toshihiko, Araki Rie (Ryuzanji Company), Yamashita Naoya (Ryuzanji Company), Sato Masahiro (WAHAHA Hongo), Katsumata Minoru, Konno Kenta (THEATRE MOMENTS), Hayashi Hideki

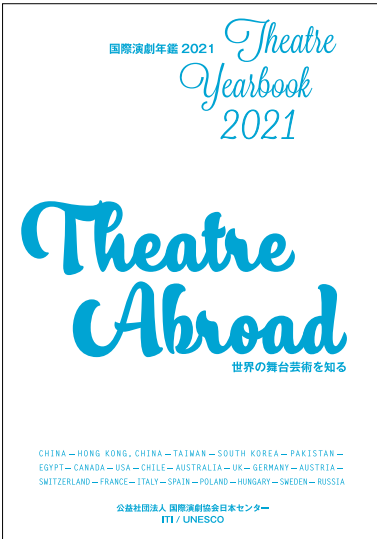
Music by Suwa So (Ryuzanji Company)



The Japanese translation of *The Murder of Isaac* has been published as a special supplementary volume of *Theatre Yearbook 2021*. If you would like to read the play or obtain a copy, please contact Japanese Centre of ITI (mail@iti-j.org).

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Companion Volume *Theatre Abroad 2021* (Japanese)

These articles do not appear in
Theatre in Japan 2021.

World Theatre Day Message by Helen Mirren

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Hungary	A Time of Conflict: The Pandemic, Theatre Policies and #MeToo, and Political Unrest at the University of Theatre and Film Arts	Iwata Miho
Sweden	Swedish Theatre during the Coronavirus: Applauding Those Who Confronted the Difficult Circumstances	Komaki Yu
Russia	A Sudden Digital Revolution and an Uncertain Restart for Theatres	Shinozaki Naoya

Developments in Japan and Overseas

Round-Table Discussion: Leading Figures from Shochiku, Toho, and Shiki
Theatre Company on the Post-Coronavirus Future for Large Theatres

Abiko Tadashi, Ikeda Atsuo, Yoshida Chiyoki (Moderator: Nagai Taeko)

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Scripts of plays in the Theatre Born in Conflict Zones series (2021)

The Murder of Isaac by Motti Lerner (Israel)

2017 *White Rabbit, Red Rabbit* by Nassim Soleimanpour (Iran)
Djihad by Ismaël Saidi (Belgium)

2018 *Khail Taiha (Lost Horses)* by Adnan Alaouda (Syria)
Lilac Duhaa (Death in the Era of Da'ish) by Ghannam Ghannam (Jordan/Palestine)

2019 *Common Ground* by Yael Ronen (Israel/Germany) & Ensemble
This Is War by Hannah Moscovitch (Canada)

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

Searching for **New Plays**

ITI Japanese Centre accepts new submissions for plays in the Theatre Born in Conflict Zones series. Please contact us at mail@iti-j.org.

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