

## Tokyo Festival World Competition 2019

### - Critics' Jury Report

The Tokyo Festival World Competition was held from Oct. 29<sup>th</sup> (Tue) to Nov. 4<sup>th</sup> (Mon) of 2019. This report is an account of the jury that took place on November 4<sup>th</sup>, in order to decide the "Critics' Choice Award". The jury took place in the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre's Atelier West, by Japanese-speaking experts of Performing Arts from worldwide regions. The Critics' Jury consisted of the following 6 members.

From Asia, Lee Chonghwa (Professor of Political Science, Politics of Culture and Postcolonial Studies in the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Law, Seikei University | From Korea) who is also known for her acquaintance with artists such as the late Koharu Kisaragi and Rio Kishida.

From Oceania, Adam Broinowski (Director/Theatre maker/Performer, Lecturer in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University | From Australia)

From Europe, Tove Björk (Associate Professor of Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Saitama University | From Finland) who studies Kabuki.

From Africa, Samuel Nfor (Actor, Adjunct lecturer in Rikkyo University, Faculty of Education | From Cameroon).

From the Americas, Cody Poulton (Professor of Pacific and Asian Studies at University of | From Canada)

From Japan, theatre critic Naoto Moriyama (Professor of Performing Arts at Kyoto University of Art & Design | From Japan)

When it was decided that Cody Poulton, facilitator of the Jury, began by re-establishing the two following "standards" of jurisdiction.

- 1) That the work proposes new artistic values within the Performing Arts, towards the 2030's
- 2) That those values are executed with high level.

The other jurors were nodding as Poulton read out these standards, and it could be seen that each member of the jury had an understanding of the given standards. Poulton then asked each member how they each interpreted these standards, opening a conversation including perspectives on what the Performing Arts scene should, and would be in 10 years' time. The jurors' interests were not bounded to solely the problem of art itself, and the conversation touched on environmental issues and political situations as well. From each of their own field

of expertise, the jurors speculated on the state of society – which both gives birth to and receives performing arts – at the year 2030.

For example, Broinowski and Nfor touched on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and SDGs, raising the question of how artists must engage with global issues using their imagination. Björk presented the perspective of whether the nominated works could be financially independent, or whether it should be supported by public subsidies.

As the jurors commented on each other's evaluation, and a sense of mutual trust was fermented within the room, the discussion gradually reached into the main issue. The following is a selection of comments on each piece, in order of its presentation within the competition.

#### **[Europe]**

**Recommender:** Agnès Troly (Program Director of Festival d'Avignon / France)

**Artist:** El Conde de Torrefiel (Barcelona, Spain)

**Title:** "Possibilités that disappear before a landscape"

A high quality piece that can very much be put on the market. I feel like 10 or 15 years ago, I would have been rejoiced to see this piece, but now, it seemed to lack a sense of something new. The content also seemed something quite common to European cities at a certain economical standard. (Tove Björk)

#### **[Africa]**

**Recommender:** Kila Claude Guingané (Administrative Director of Festival International de Théâtre et de Marionnettes de Ouagadougou / Burkina Faso)

**Artist:** Charles Nomwendé Tiendrebéogo (Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso)

**Title:** "Mea Culpa"

Writing, directing, and acting alone, and yet there is a strong theatrical physicality. This is something that will undoubtedly last in the 2030's. The piece is both old and new, and carries qualities that cannot easily be disregarded. (Naoto Moriyama)

#### **[Oceania]**

**Recommender:** Stephen Armstrong (Creative Director of Asia TOPA / Australia)

**Artist:** Sydney Chamber Opera (Sydney, Australia)

**Title:** "The Howling Girls"

From the stomach to the lungs, the lungs to the throat, the throat to the lips, breath is carried but is without words. The trauma is not solved, but the shocking moment of darkness turning to light is something one could hardly forget, and left a strong impression. (Cody Poulton)

**[Americas]**

**Recommender:** Carmen Romero Quero (Executive Director of Festival Internacional Santiago a Mil / Chile)

**Artist:** Bonobo (Santiago, Chile)

**Title:** "You Shall Love"

Many of the works presented in this competition entailed directorial decisions that showed ourselves as unconscious accomplices of structural violence. Humans constantly create "Others" in order to protect ourselves. The prologue scene that shows the Indios and colonists displayed that this defense mechanism is something historical and traditional. (Lee Chonghwa)

**[Asia]**

**Recommender:** Seonghee Kim (Independent Curator / Producer, former artistic director of Asian Arts Theatre)

**Artist:** Dai Chenlian

**Title:** "Big Nothing"

Perhaps this eagerness to enter the world of shadows is the will to escape the here and now. The exclusion of the outside noise and emphasis of silence perhaps show the state of mind of the artist who works in Beijing today. (Adam Broinowski)

**[Japan]**

**Recommender:** Yoshiji Yokoyama (Programmer of Tokyo Festival)

**Artist:** dracom (Osaka, Japan)

**Title:** "Sokonaizu - Bottomless"

The piece dealt with serious social themes such as that of neglect. The performers seemed to truly believe in the few words they spoke, and the delivery of the words were also beautiful. Though a piece with a serious message, the director did not choose a vigorous, aggressive directorial style.

After all comments were presented, the jury took a break. The afternoon would be the process of choosing the “Critics’ Choice Award” through discussion and votes. First, the jurors each voted on three works they would like to discuss as the final recipient of the award.

**Result of initial voting:**

“The Howling Girls” 5 votes

“Sokonaizu - Bottomless” “You Shall Love” 4 votes

“Mea Culpa” 3 votes

“Big Nothing” 2 votes

The possibility of “Possibilites that disappear before a landscape” receiving the award was eliminated at this point, and jurors made a series of important comments on the remaining candidates. The discussion revealed that the critics were all able to explain “why they did not choose a certain piece” as clearly as “why they chose a certain piece”.

Broinowski commented that while “The Howling Girls” centering its structure around young women was notable, he felt that the fact that the constant vocal “expression” did not coincide with the motif of “trauma”, which is being unable to express certain experiences, and thus did not vote for the piece.

Poulton and Nfor, who did not choose “Mea Culpa”, commented that the piece has a form similar to a TV show, and within that rapid pace, one was astonished by the text and was not left the capacity to digest the event as an individual audience.

Lee, who did not vote for “Sokonaizu - Bottomless” pointed out that within this poetic theatre text, there was actually the option of the vocabulary becoming increasingly rich, as opposed to the characters simply losing their words as they die.

Though there were moments of harsh words in evaluating each of the pieces, it was notable of the Critics’ Jury that they were all aware of the difference between their evaluation of “likeness” and “quality”. While Björk noted that she did not necessarily “like The Howling Girls”, she nonetheless recognized the high quality in music and message, and chose the piece as a possible recipient. Björk also pointed out how “Sokonaizu - Bottomless” depicts the characters as choosing their own deaths, and stated that she felt the piece was “irresponsible” in failing to recognize that death is not something one can control, and ultimately makes light of those who are placed in extreme poverty. But at the same time, she recognized that the play

was beautifully executed.

Moriyama added that, he would like the critics' jury to collectively recognize the methods of "Big Nothing". While his method of expression was more grounded in the imaginary world of the artist, factors such as censorship calls for artists to employ different methods depending on where they work.

Finally, it was decided that the final round of votes will be held between "The Howling Girls", "You Shall Love", and "Sokonaizu- Bottomless". Each juror has one vote. Seeing the difficulty that the jurors were having deciding the final vote, Poulton advised that they "choose the artist they want to support in their growth in the following 10 years". But to all's surprise, the result turned out quite simply.

**Result of deciding vote:**

"You Shall Love" 4 votes

"The Howling Girls" 1 vote

"Sokonaizu - Bottomless" 1 vote

"You Shall Love" was chosen as the recipient of the Critics' Jury Award. The jurors smiled at the fact that they managed to agree on the recipient with a single vote. It was proof that they had discussed thoroughly about all 6 pieces.

The jurors constantly mentioned that "By today's standards, the best piece would be this" but "When in mind that the choice is for the 2030's, this would be the choice". But come to think of it, there is no certainty that all of us here at the Atelier West would be in association with performing arts in the 2030's, or, alive, even (More so the case if you include all performers, staff, and audience of the works presented at this competition). But nonetheless, the jurors each took responsibility in their role to examine the quality of work in a range of over 10 years - Simulating "2030", that will undeniably arrive in 11 years. The selfless perspective, connecting the work with the audience and critics of the future. That was the calm, yet supporting qualities of the critics' jury.

In closing this report, I would like to touch on how carefully the competition was prepared by director, Yoshiji Yokoyama.

Before the competition opened, "Recommender's Presentations" were held, and each

recommender explained how they had chosen the work for the competition. The recommenders also held a “Recommendors’ Talk” where they each introduced their own work. This shows Yokoyama’s determination to communicate “why the recommenders saw these works as important for the next generation”.

In addition to being a place of gathering for many, theatre must also be cultivated by those with high expertise. One of the great contributions of the Tokyo Festival World Competition is proving that there are recommenders in regions word wide, as well as artist and critic jurors, who are able to share the actualities of this era. This is a strong message for performing arts practitioners, that no matter where you work, there are people who can watch seeds grow, and send out the fruit to the right place at the right time.

Makiko Ochi

Born 1983, in Tokyo. Graduate of Hitotsubashi University, Faculty of Law. Founder of LittleSophy. Other than her work related to theatre criticism, in recent years, Makiko is also a student in classic ballet. Twitter: @maki\_co