

Asian Performing Arts Festival

Participant Interview #03

Toru Sasaki / Director

Toru Sasaki is Playwright and Director of the theater company reqoo-zoo-room. Among the participant teams, he was the only director who wrote a new play prior to the Festival, and presented an excerpt from the one-and-a-half hour long play as a short piece.

“I thought that there is too much loss of time if I started writing the script after meeting the members (on the first day). I wanted to present something that I put all my energy into as a writer. Rather than writing a short piece that lasts 10-15 minutes and to expand it, I thought that enduring the difficulty of choosing something among the many choices would result in a better work in the end.

Not to mention the language barrier, the cultural and environmental differences naturally appear. I decided to dedicate myself earnestly to “create a good work,” instead of trying to understand each other. I thought that if we can connect at the roots of the love of theater, we can accept each other in spite of our differences in thinking, thus, there is no need to be overtly eager about international exchange.

While saying so, Sasaki visited the rehearsal rooms of the other teams when he was not rehearsing himself, and was actively engaged in communication with the foreign artists. What started it was the words of Kim Sin Ki from Korea: “Is just creating a work enough?”

“These words were my wake up call: from the following day, I started visiting the other teams' rehearsal rooms. Through the conversations with the other artists, I came to realize that the creators all share the same thoughts despite our cultural differences. I did not feel the distance there.

Li Hui-Wen of the Century Contemporary Dance Company, who participated in my team from Taipei, asked me if she could 'tie up her hair when dancing.' When I answered that I preferred her hair down, she responded, 'All men prefer women putting their hair down. You are also a man.' Our rehearsal room was always filled with laughter.”

Sasaki was able to deepen the exchanges with the participants of the foreign teams while maintaining his firm commitment to the theater creation as a writer. The ten days of the Festival allowed him to gain a substantial experience, and he is confident that he “spent more delicious, more luxurious time than anyone else.”

“I am grateful for the fact that I was able to work in an ideal environment as an artist. As I mentioned at the Round Table Meeting on the theme 'Artistic Quality v. Audience Accessibility,' this kind of creative environment gave me fresh inspiration as I was a bit worn out from presenting works independently.

The other teams' works were all interesting, too. I was convinced that this year's Festival was the best festival of the past decade. It was truly fulfilling. Even though the performance lasted for three long hours, I could feel the audience's level of concentration by looking at them.

I think that it was a good thing that the admission was free. It was a luxury. In Japan, the hurdle to come to the theater itself is still high. In that sense, I believe that the Asian Performing Arts Festival can become a positive trigger.”