

chelfitsch & Dai Fujikura with Klangforum Wien (Austria)

## “Work-In-Progress for Music Theatre Production”

### First Report: Launch of Project

Author: SHIMANUKI Taisuke

#### The Role of the Process Observer

“Process Observer” may be an unfamiliar job title to many, but I feel like it accurately encapsulates what I was requested to do by the Japan Foundation. The contents of that request can be summarized as follows:

To participate in the production process of a collaboration between artists with differing interests as a third-party observer and to conduct interviews and monitor the progress of the project; and to verbalize and report on that process, including any problems or challenges that arise.

Archiving the performing arts has become actively discussed and practiced in recent years. However, unlike formative arts such as painting and sculpture, the results and processes of the performing arts are difficult to preserve in material form. Or rather, because they center around sharing the experience of complementary and continuous collaboration among actors, audiences, and spaces amid the irreversible flow of time, unless a special concept is established in advance, it is extremely rare for the work to be fixed as a physical object. Furthermore, as the performing arts often do not belong to individuals but rather to large groups of unspecified people (the “creator” may sometimes even include the audience), it is by definition impossible to consolidate the creation to a single location. This makes it difficult to convert the performing arts into linear discourse, such that they seem to inherently refuse archiving. Perhaps, that is why performing art creators and researchers have become caught up in renewing understanding of works based on the reproduction of their totalities via fragments that constitute and prove their existence like plays, photographs, video, props, audio sources, and descriptive information such as reviews, as well as approaches toward their origins and the zeitgeist of the time and place. An obsession with archiving the trajectories of works is born.

Here in Japan in 2021, it is “Process Observers” who play a part in the effort to record the generation and transformation of physical expressions that humanity has repeated tens and hundreds of millions of times since the dawn of history. I believe that the fact that the Japan Foundation, which is neither a creator nor a researcher but rather a public institution, has strongly indicated its willingness to lead these efforts lends great significance to the project.

Despite my somewhat long preamble, it is against this backdrop that I was assigned to chelfitsch’s *Music Theatre Production*.

At least, that was the title when I was commissioned in the spring of 2021. By the time that the details of the performance on November 5 at Tower Hall Funabori (Tokyo) were released in October of that year, the official title had become *chelfitsch & FUJIKURA Dai with Klangforum Wien: Work-In-Progress for Music Theatre Production*. The phrase “Work-In-Progress” indicates that the performance is not the endpoint of the project. It is with a detailed explanation of this context that I begin my report.

#### In the Producer’s Words

My involvement in the project began in earnest with my participation in

about two weeks of workshops from July 12 to 23, 2021, just before the inauguration of the Tokyo Olympics. However, prior to this, I interviewed Producer OUKI Tamiko remotely on June 30 out of my belief that the entirety of a work includes not only the practical creation by the director and actors, but also the planning from which it all started and the management by producers.

According to Ouki, the project originated in a commission from Vienna, Austria.

**Ouki:** It all began with a commission from Wiener Festwochen artistic director Christophe (SLAGMUYLDER) to create a new work for the 2022 festival. Initially, the commission was for a work related to music in some way, namely, music of a genre originating in the West. This was connected to the local character and history of Vienna, which is known as the “City of Music.”

Wiener Festwochen is an arts festival held annually from May to June. It was founded in 1951 with the aim of reviving culture after World War II. In addition to a program to delight fans of classical music with magnificent concerts by famous conductors and the Vienna Philharmonic, the festival also includes experimental stage productions and operas by diverse artists at the forefront of contemporary dance, theater, and film such as Anne Teresa DE KEERSMAEKER, Romeo CASTELLUCCI, and Michael HANEKE, as well as exhibitions of contemporary art.

Literally translating to “festival weeks,” Wiener Festwochen could truly be called a festival in which the city and its inhabitants are blessed with art. At the same time, it has also been characterized by critically and politically provocative content. In 2000, Christoph SCHLINGENSIEF staged *Foreigners out! (Ausländer raus! Schlingensiefs Container, 2000)*, a legendary work still talked about today, in which immigrants to Austria (played by actors) living in a makeshift container camp (actually a set) installed in front of the city hall were deported one by one through a public vote. His scathing criticism of the right-wing drift in the Austrian political climate resulted in a firestorm of controversy and ended with a left-wing group raiding the venue to rescue the “immigrants,” an outcome that surpassed even the creator’s expectations. The duality of art is that it can comfort and delight people or challenge society as an external provocateur. In this sense, too, Wiener Festwochen plays an important role.

chelfitsch’s *Music Theatre Production* was a work to be created within the context of this city and history.

**Ouki:** “A collaboration with music not limited to classical” and “a performance accompanied by live music” were presented as conditions of the project. The next premise was that the players would be Klangforum Wien. When it came to the composer, I remember that FUJIKURA Dai, who had a history of collaborating with them, was named.

#### From “Objects” to “Sound”

OKADA Toshiki (chelfitsch) has a deep relationship with music. It is well known that the title of his magnum opus *Five Days in March* (premiered in 2004) derives from “Five Days” by the band Sangatsu (meaning “March” in Japanese). In addition to scenography by contemporary artists such as KANEUJI Teppei, TAKAMINE Tadasu, and HISAKADO Tsuyoshi, many of Okada’s works were born from collaboration with musicians. *Ground and Floor* (premiered in 2013), for which Sangatsu served as composers, is

such a case in which the organically transforming relationships between the actors, the lines spoken by the actors, and the music that fills the space are intertwined on a high level. Christophe Slagmuylder, the original proposer of *Music Theatre Production*, was also deeply involved in the lead-up to its creation.

**Ouki:** *Ground and Floor* was the first work commissioned by Christophe while he was the director of Kunstenfestivaldesarts. Sure enough, it was born from a commission to “do something related to music.” Christophe and Matthias (LILIENTHAL) have played somewhat of a parental role in fostering Okada’s creative work in Europe, and we have immense trust in them. It was therefore clear that their commission represented a high-level challenge, and we were quite naturally able to envision trying something new.

Okada himself is the kind of person who flexibly accepts the limitations he’s given and develops his imagination on that basis, so you could say it was an ideal creative environment.

The timing of the commission may have also yielded results. It was around the time when chelfitsch had begun planning *Eraser Mountain* (premiered in 2019) in collaboration with the previously mentioned Kaneuji. The theme of the relationship between “people and objects” was at the foreground of this work, which was created following research into the changing relationship between humans and nature in the wake of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, such as the massive levees constructed in devastated areas along the coast as a countermeasure against future tsunami waves.

Taking dialogue as the smallest unit of communication between people and drama as the cultural form in which people receive this as an audience, *Eraser Mountain* sought to establish a dialogic relationship between the actors and various ready-made goods such as daily necessities and sports equipment placed on the stage. For this reason, the performance included attempts to break away from the existing formation of relationships with the audience by having the actors often direct the vectors of their performances far above the stage rather than at the audience. Okada’s interest in creating these kinds of “non-anthropocentric” representations seems to have developed radically, particularly in the wake of the 2011 disaster.

It figures prominently in *Ground and Floor* and *Time’s Journey Through a Room* (premiered in 2016), which depict ghosts or ghostly presences, and in *NO THEATER* (premiered in 2017) and *Unfulfilled Ghost and Monster - ZAHA / TSURUGA* (performance version premiered in 2021), which reflect Okada’s interest in the format of Noh theater, an artistic medium that straddles the border between this world and the next. In *Wakata-san’s Cookies* (premiered in 2015), currently the only children’s work of Okada’s career, he also experimented with building “imagery” using objects through collaboration with Kaneuji Teppei.

**Ouki:** At the first meeting for *Music Theatre Production*, we discussed replacing the “objects” in *Eraser Mountain* with “sound” and developing the issue of “humans and sound.” Of course, the earthquake wasn’t the only turning point, but I believe that awareness of the issue of how to respond to things beyond human control, like the changes in “ways of viewing the world” to which we were awakened by events connected to the disaster, has been fundamental to Okada’s works over the past ten years.

## chelfitsch as a “Laboratory”

Taking *Music Theatre Production* as a novel work positioned within the lineage of Okada’s interest in “humans and objects,” or to go one step further, his search for humanity through expressions to materialize impersonal representations (the shifting of persons, diversification of identities, and so on within the work), there is yet another perspective.

**Ouki:** Music occupies a large part of the production, and constant collaboration with the composer and players who realize that is a major challenge on the production level as well. This is one of the reasons why we had YOKOBORI Masahiko, who is well versed in both contemporary and classical music, join us as a dramaturge.

Although the production is under the name of Okada Toshiki, there’s significance in taking on this challenge as “chelfitsch through and through.” It’s something I discuss a lot with Okada—we think about the group chelfitsch as a kind of “laboratory.” We see it as a venue for developing new methods and acquiring new dramatic languages. It’s meaningful for us to take on the challenge with actors who have been working on those experiments with us for a long time. That’s why for this project, we approached six actors without holding auditions.

*Music Theatre Production* has six cast members: AOYAGI Izumi, ASAKURA Chieko, OMURA Wataru, KAWASAKI Mariko, SHIIBASHI Ayana, and YAZAWA Makoto. Aoyagi and Yazawa in particular are actors whom one might call Okada’s “regulars.” The other four have only taken part in one or two works each, but most have experience in roles at the cores of the respective works. Regarding his criteria for choosing them, Okada noted in the workshops and a later interview that “each of them has the power of an original ‘voice.’” He also emphasized “having adequate volume for the audience to understand what is being said even when acting with live music.” One could say that the cast was assembled for its potential to enhance the accuracy of this experiment while flexibly changing and developing its direction.

**Ouki:** Another important thing is that Christophe values the experimental nature of chelfitsch. The number of commissions received by Okada personally has increased greatly over the past several years, but Christophe’s commissions are always for chelfitsch. I think that’s because he understands the importance of the many challenges that Okada has undertaken with his actors.

## International Exchange in the Wake of the Pandemic

In this interview, which was conducted before workshops began in earnest, references to Fujikura Dai and Klangforum Wien remained minimal (due to my limited knowledge as a researcher at that point). However, I am sure that I will go into more detail regarding the importance of the musical aspects of the production in the third and fourth reports, which bring up the workshops and subsequent work-in-progress performance held in November 2021.

I would like to conclude this report by touching on the future of Okada Toshiki and chelfitsch’s overseas activities. Performances of many works both in Japan and overseas were forced to be canceled or postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic that broke out in late 2019. *Music Theatre*

*Production*, too, suffered no small impact. The originally planned performance with Fujikura Dai and Klangforum Wien invited to Tokyo was quickly abandoned, and an alternate plan was considered with the Japanese side traveling to Vienna for a local performance. In the end, the format was switched to hold the performance at the Tokyo venue with previously filmed footage of Klangforum Wien playing, live music by Ensemble Nomado, and Fujikura giving feedback via remote connection. Over the past two years or so, the performing arts that arise when performers travel to different places and are received by audiences in each place have been forced into direct contact with a global-scale paradigm shift due to the pandemic. How is chelfitsch confronting this situation?

**Ouki:** This is something we've been thinking about for a while. The basic premise is that our policy of sustaining global deployment won't change. The issue is finding a way to sustain it more flexibly. In truth, whether or not we can tour with full-scale works in upcoming years like we did in the past has become quite precarious. Although discussion of a future European tour has already begun, we're moving ahead with the discussion with an eye on changes in the situation, ready to partially apply the brakes at some point. We're constantly prepared to propose a "Plan B" in response to the pandemic.

We also have to consider the changing awareness of environmental impacts in Europe. For example, *Eraser Mountain* is one of chelfitsch's most voluminous works, both in terms of the number of people and the amount of art. Now that artists like Jérôme BEL who don't travel by plane are appearing in the performing art world, I feel like we need to call into question the meaning of holding performances that require the movement of people and things, investing huge amounts of money and time, and burdening the global environment.

Okada has earned a solid reputation in Europe through the enthusiasm generated by *Five Days in March* in 2004, *Ground and Floor* inspired by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, and *Super Premium Soft Double Vanilla Rich* (premiered in 2014), as well as his four-work repertoire starting with the 2016 remake of *Hot Pepper, Air Conditioner, and the Farewell Speech* (premiered in 2009) for Münchner Kammerspiele and continuing with *NO THEATER, NO SEX* (2018), and *The Vacuum Cleaner* (2019). What has been expected of Okada and what he has responded to through these works is representations of Japan and Japanese people as seen by Europeans. Here, I feel that one cannot deny the curious gaze of European exoticism, which still remains deeply rooted. How to relativize this, whether to cover it conversely in the work or to give a completely different answer, will be an issue for Okada and chelfitsch and perhaps an even greater one for critique on the Japanese side.

**Ouki:** I believe that transposing Japanese contexts into different ones is an intuition, and also a weapon, that Okada has cultivated over about fifteen years of overseas performances. Now that the entire world is facing the same crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the validity of that intercontextuality is something we will need to continue thinking about.

Today, all of humanity has synchronously experienced the pandemic, albeit with various gradations. Given that one of the primary purposes of contemporary art is the discovery of differences through interaction as well as critical dismantling and reconstruction based thereon, what kinds

of turns will it take? Although this research is not necessarily an opportunity to approach the answer to that great question, the intersections and exchanges of values that Okada and chelfitsch have implemented may serve as a valid measure for contemplation. I will finally delve into more details of the practical production in the second report. As I proceed with my writing, I hope to continually check my awareness of the issues underlying this process.

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## “Work-In-Progress for Music Theatre Production”

### Second Report: Rehearsal, Part I

Author: SHIMANUKI Taisuke

July 12, 2021: Workshop Day 1

The creation of *Music Theatre Production* began in earnest at Steep Slope Studio in Yokohama, a place where many previous chelfitsch works were created. At the same time, with the exception of OKADA Toshiki and FUJIKURA Dai, who had already taken part in several meetings, the actors and nearly all of the staff were meeting for the first time as a cast today. As the starting time of the workshop approached, the six actors trickled in and began their own particular warm-ups.

Fujikura, who is based in the UK, joined via Zoom from London, where it was 7 o'clock in the morning. Sound designer Nagie was also present on the Yokohama side to convey a sense of actually being at the venue both visually and auditorily to the remote location. Microphones were set up throughout the studio to catch every word of the practice and feedback, almost as if a traveling music studio had visited the theatrical space (this setup would go on to be used to even greater effect in the latter half of the creative process in November).

First, Okada explained the principles of the project: that it was commissioned by Vienna and therefore needed to be a work incorporating music, namely, Western music other than rock. However, the assignment was not to create an opera, so the production would aim for musical theater without “singing.” What did that mean? Well, it was still only a vague concept, but that was the starting point.

**Okada:** My image of these actors is that they have rhythm when they speak, their own sort of musicality. But that shouldn't be expressed through singing. And the creation will be based on the format of “musical theater.” I think the next two weeks will be spent figuring out more or less what that will look like.

I considered holding a karaoke contest on the first day, but as we're not aiming for “singing,” I gave up on that thought. Theatrical lines have a melody that ought to emerge even without music, but it's often accompanied by music. How to link these two aspects will be essential.

Ordinarily, singing consists of uttering words to a melody. Music is a fairly strong condition, with the words fitting into it. But it's possible to reverse that relationship. While I'm saying this, I'm thinking of *Different Trains* by Steve REICH. What I imagine is the “lead-up” to this application of a melody to recorded audio.

*Different Trains* (1988) by Reich, a pioneer of minimal music, is a piece in which a string quartet performs live while a tape of a prerecorded string quartet, speech by acquaintances of Reich, and fabricated train sounds and sirens plays. Although it is a political work drawing on the themes of Reich's Jewish heritage and the Holocaust, it is also a strongly structured work that creates a sense of urgency, with the preconfigured and live sounds pursuing and breaking away from one another, as well as the in-between space formed by that interplay.

Next, Okada introduced the idea shared during the creation of *Eraser*

*Mountain* of “becoming semi-transparent” (the concept, first proposed by artist KANEUJI Teppei, that relating to objects makes one's own existence become semi-transparent). Okada concluded his opening speech by explaining that although this is not a phrase or idea that everyone can comprehend immediately, the people involved in the creative process need to find some kind of key concept for the production.

First, a workshop was held, partly in order to share chelfitsch's creative process with Fujikura, who was observing it for the first time. In the workshop, the actors were to one by one “describe how you imagine the room in which you currently live or used to live.” This format is an old standby of Okada's that he always uses during the creative process and auditions. However, the content seemed like it might resonate with that of *Music Theatre Production*, which was to have a “house” as its main setting. It would also be meaningful in conveying to Fujikura the embodiment and amplification of “imagination” that Okada emphasizes.

OMURA Wataru's turn was first. Although he had experience participating in one of Okada's works with *EIZO-Theater*, this was his first time joining in the theatrical creative process. Omura attempted a performance of interacting with an invisible house. In response, Okada commented that he “might be able to perform more freely by removing the act of touching.” What struck me was how by repeatedly asking everyone “Do you understand what I'm saying?” it felt like Okada was restoring the actors' awareness so that the goal would not become too abstract, and at the same time conversely liberating that awareness. When Omura actually tried limiting his “touching” gestures after these exchanges, a chelfitsch-style performance suddenly materialized. I also had the impression that the restrained movements caused the actor's imagination to be more tightly condensed within his mind and body, resulting in a greater density of visual information for the viewer (me).

**Okada:** It's not that I want to make the audience think that the actor is imagining something, but that's the result. It's important to convey that sense of “Oh, I've got it.” Liberating the actor from the specific action of “touching the wall” creates new potential.

While forming a robust axis to his modes of expression, these kinds of indications by Okada were not conveyed homogeneously to all of the actors.

**Okada:** As these six actors have strong personalities, if left to their own devices, they'll become disjointed in a positive sense. I definitely don't want to force them into the same format; I want to figure out what kinds of directions are interesting to explore without sorting or consolidating them into a clean explanation. Something unbroken with clear logic loses the elements that were haphazard or fragmented in a good way. I want to pursue completion in a different direction, a more mysterious kind of completion.

During the first day's workshop, Okada urged the participants several times “not to rush for completion.” What surprised me personally was how at the start of the workshop, Okada set aside the recent trend of invoking the theatrical format exemplified by the face-to-face relationship with the audience inherent in the proscenium arch as well as the modality and spatiality of classical performing arts, and yet sharpening the intensity of the imagery that the performance produces for the audience

through varied introduction and reinforcement of “imagination,” as something to be expected. For example, he pointed out that evaluation of the pros and cons of the kind of overly movement-focused performance that Omura attempted in the beginning could fall into the binary of whether or not the imagery portrayed is vivid. Okada stated that rather than the actors full-out driving imagination into their bodies and building it up, he wanted to pursue more relaxed completion keeping a sense of imperfection. (Okada also worded this as “not being dependent.” However, he added that dependency is a necessary condition of acting and that it is not usually seen as something negative.)

**Okada:** Tomorrow, we’ll start using the script I’ve written. Although it’s a complicated script, let’s think about how to “leave space without rushing.” Even though there are pauses, they definitely shouldn’t be idle time for expression. These pauses may be meaningful—may be effective—when they’re intertwined with Mr. Fujikura’s music. Intertwining the script and music in that manner—that’s the kind of vision I have right now.

### July 13, 2021: Workshop Day 2

On the morning of the second day, Okada, who had been suffering from a sore neck since the previous day, indicated that his discomfort had increased even further. Despite his painful appearance, there was something chelitsch-style about his shuffling and sliding motions aimed at minimizing the movement of his upper body, reminiscent of Noh theater. (The situation might not have been out of place in one of Okada’s plays.) Everyone wished for his recovery.

The day started with a continuation of the previous day’s “room” workshop. YAZAWA Makoto enacted revisiting the house where he had lived when he was kindergartner. Okada pointed out that when Yazawa was talking about a photograph, he lifted up his hand. Yazawa replied that he did so because it was on the second floor.

**Okada:** It’s interesting that the memory is above when you try to re-enact it concretely, because there’s no inherent necessity for it to be above. There’s a hint here. Spatializing something that’s not a space generates movement. Although it’s a violent process, memories and recollections can be spatialized.

Rather than how imagination is reflected in the performance, what I want to question with this lineup is how to use your imagination when talking about something. And now, let’s watch a video together.

The video showed composer and pianist TAKAHASHI Yuji playing Bach and talking about contemporary music on the occasion of the release of his album *Yoin to teutsuri* (2018) 1. In the interview, Takahashi is asked about the concept of his playing and composing. He responds, “A work itself isn’t something complete, but rather a collection of fragments—notes for what you’re planning to do... Bach’s music consists of finished works, but in the process of playing them, they’re able to become incomplete.” In parallel with the interview, Takahashi plays Partita in C Minor, BWV 997, while alternately looking at the sheet music and his own fingering with great care. Okada described this as Takahashi composing right at that very moment and suggested that the practice of taking something complete and making it incomplete would harness the potential of the script that he had written.

Next, a very short play with the provisional title *Never Given* was shared among the actors and staff. This work was to be modified daily with additions and deletions through the workshop. Its title was taken from the container ship *Ever Given*, which ran aground in the Suez Canal in March 2021, causing the long-term obstruction of one of the world’s most key shipping routes. Okada said that the title was just something he made up, but he seemed to feel some conviction in it—the grounding of the ship blessed with the name *Ever Given* changing its name to *Never Given*.

The work carries on the themes explored in *Eraser Mountain*, which concerned itself with the “outside” of the human world. It presents an unsettling depiction of the lives of liberal-minded people about to descend into chaos due to the intrusion of a natural phenomenon (a typhoon) and the law (an eviction order from a landlord), with references to the January 2021 attack on the US Capitol by conservative and far-right Americans.

**Okada:** If it’s acted out with a high finished quality, I feel like the concept will waver. Reading through the script printed out like this, each line is long, even though I tried to make them short when I was writing it.

I don’t know how to achieve the “notes” that Takahashi was talking about, playing something as if it were scribbles. So, for now, let’s just read it all together.

The following are excerpts of exchanges between Okada and the actors after reading the play several times.

**KAWASAKI Mariko:** I said the line as if I were in the rain, or rather, inside a house while raindrops were falling.

**Okada:** I thought that was good. Imagining how to close when you start talking is difficult, at least for me, because you start without a full picture.

**Yazawa:** Mumbling awkwardly, it’s not quite right either. I think that’s the thing about Takahashi practicing so hard.

**Okada:** While it’s possible in theory to present the play totally analyzed and torn apart, I don’t feel like that leads to the acting becoming more interesting.

**SHIBASHI Ayana:** Without imagining anything... In terms of emotion, it’s a bit uncomfortable, but...something like uttering lines differently, not imagining a space. Although, I’m not sure.

**Okada:** I don’t think “emotion” should be disregarded, but just like the growth of a tumor, emphasizing emotion is a question of degree. For example, if you were suddenly asked to give a wedding speech, you could do it, even if it was a bit awkward, because of your feelings of happiness for the couple. On that level, emotions are key. But could you call falling rain a question of degree on the scale of emotion?

...Uttering lines, aiming them at a target, is parabolic. In acting, there may be an “understanding” that assumes you’re approaching a landing, the end of the line. This is something you can only do when you have a bird’s-eye view of all of the lines. It’s possible that pretending you don’t know despite having a bird’s-eye view allows you to make the parabola invisible to yourself.

Based on these kinds of exchanges, in his next performance, Omura Wataru tried uttering his lines or performing as if his motivation abruptly gave out. Taking this as experimentation without defining the endpoint of the performance, one might refer to the phrase “jumping the gun,” which emerged later during ASAKURA Chieko and Yazawa Makoto’s practice, as the verbalization of experimenting without defining a starting point.

**Okada:** The subject of “jumping the gun” that was raised here concerns itself with “length”—so long that you don’t know when it’ll end. This could possibly mean not knowing the direction of what you’re talking about. It’s like getting on a train with no idea of where it’ll arrive or when.

Obviously, you need to correctly understand the script you’re reading right now. But I want you to intentionally leave it loose—just whether the shape is round or square, for example. Something made to order or specially arranged is too boring.

Afterwards, experimentation connected to the concepts of “incompletion,” “parabolas,” and “jumping the gun” continued almost until the ending time. Lastly, video was recorded to be sent to Fujikura as a reference for composing.

### July 14, 2021: Workshop Day 3

On the third day, Okada arrived at the studio after visiting a hospital to have his neck checked out. Although the examination did not reveal any serious problems, he made for a sorry sight in his immobilizing neck cast.

Fujikura’s adaption of his existing compositions for the video recorded at the end of the previous day had arrived without delay, so everyone gave it a listen. According to dramaturge YOKOBORI Masahiko, he had the impression that Fujikura’s works included a relatively large number of very dense and continuous ones but that this time he had chosen more porous compositions with breaks or pauses. Following this, opinions were exchanged about the music.

**Okada:** It’s interesting that when the piano is used, it feels like the piano’s talking or acting like a translator. The piano’s great. But conversely, it also makes me want to create interesting relationships with the other instruments as well.

It seems like you could express scene changes through differences in the melody and instruments. For example, if two characters are having a dialogue and another character enters, you could think of that as the scene changing. You could also assign melodies and instruments to each character. I think it would be interesting to explore the relationship between the composition and scene in different ways.

*Never Given* is a dialogic play for six characters reminiscent of a university professor, an assistant, and students. The idea of defining and re-arranging their relationships through the instruments and melody would continue to be discussed and implemented in various ways in later workshops once Fujikura had become involved in earnest. I will go into detail regarding the contents of those workshops in the latter half of my report. (As of the third-day workshop, my impression was that the music was still only realized as a hint or guide for experimenting with the performances.)

Just like the previous day, on this day there was continuing discussion of the extemporaneity and incompleteness of performance, such as the peculiar way in which novelist TAWADA Yoko, who writes in German as well as Japanese, ends her writing (if there is an order for two hundred pages of manuscript paper, spontaneously ending as the two-hundredth page arrives). Different views on “parabolas” were also presented.



Creation workshop

**Okada:** Although not making language parabolic suffices as a concept, a determination to never make it parabolic isn't really usable. More normally, it's just "talking without knowing the ending," or rather, it's simpler to think of it as always jumping the gun in life, like Ms. Asakura said.

While Okada's interest in this kind of "uncertainty" in a broad sense is connected to his experimentation with techniques and styles of performance, it may also be very much tied to the plot of *Never Given*, which depicts premonitions of happenings "outside" a certain community and the "internal" disquiet they produce. Okada made statements to this effect during the day's workshop.

**Okada:** I want this to be an event happening inside a certain building. Whenever there's an inside, there's also something outside. You can translate this into a controllable humanistic space and what lies outside it.

What's important when acting is creating something "outside" on the level of imagination. By doing this, you establish the issue of there being both an inside and an outside. It's not an issue of whether or not the set has physical walls, but rather of the method of imagining. In this case, "rain" is a very easily understandable subject. People hang bedding outside because they want it to dry soft and fluffy, but it's completely possible that it'll become soaking wet instead. That's what I want to present through every possible means.

The simulated family problems that we're currently doing are enough to create drama, but that's not what I want to do. What's outside is bigger. This is the early stage to establish that there's something outside, and it's bigger. And later, it won't even matter. The creation of this contrast is what I'm envisioning.

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<sup>1</sup> "Takahashi Yuji Plays Bach and Talks about Contemporary Music"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YBG1WbufTY> (Last accessed: March 2, 2022)

chelfitsch & Dai Fujikura with Klangforum Wien (Austria)  
 “Work-In-Progress for Music Theatre  
 Production”  
 Third Report: Rehearsals, Part II  
 Author: SHIMANUKI Taisuke

July 21–23, 2021

I joined the workshop for the first time in three days. Starting on this day, rehearsals took place at Yamabuki Factory in Tokyo. OKADA Toshiki seemed to be in excellent condition with his neck cast removed.

First, a video was shared in which FUJIKURA Dai had added fragments of some of his original compositions over the run-through footage filmed at Steep Slope Studio. Fujikura had also edited the video so that two musicians (a flutist and guitarist) appeared to be playing alongside the actors' performances. The setup was such that there was space for the actors on the left side of the stage and for the musicians on the right side as viewed by the audience. Okada, who had been continually thinking about the antagonism between the music and performances throughout the workshops, supported the idea for use in the actual performance.

In an email that he sent to Okada based on the content of past workshops, Fujikura said that performing together with the musicians (or audio) would strongly influence the actors. More specifically, the addition of music would alter the performance. For example, the performers might change the speed of their reading according to that of the music. Okada responded that while the possibility of this collaboration promised to serve as a powerful weapon for the work, he wanted to emphasize the “comprehensibility” of the lines of the play, that is, the words of the actors. I had heard similar statements during the production process for *Pratthana – A Portrait of Possession* (premiered in 2018). The acoustic design of this work was handled by ARAKI Masamitsu, an artist who makes acoustic-sculpture-like installations. He was very careful in finding ways to balance the sound from the acoustic equipment so that it would not interfere with the actors' speech.

**Okada:** If the listeners give up on understanding, the lines will become mere sound. It goes without saying that we can't let that happen. Through the rehearsals, I think the actors will gradually be able to grasp the logic of what they're saying. As long as there's some kind of core or structure to it, the audience will be able to grasp it as well. Otherwise, I imagine that it'll slip away like an octopus. “Incompletion” is crucial as well, but first, let's create a core.

In the later July workshops, the relationships established between the performances and music became a prominent element. Rehearsals continued, interposed with discussions with Fujikura in London remotely linked to the studio.

**Okada:** By watching Fujikura's video, I learned that playing music means moving your body. However, I don't think that it's a good idea for me to direct the musicians' movements. I feel like I can accentuate something by showing the actors and musicians moving respectively.

**Fujikura:** The two musicians in the video are orchestral players. Their bodies move because they're trying to match each other's playing without a conductor. The number of musicians I envision for *Music Theatre Production*, five, is the very limit of viability without a conductor, but what I wanted to show with the video I created is the appeal of chamber music. It's an example of an ensemble as acting.

After rehearsing several times with just the actors, rehearsals began with couches and stools lined up in a stage-like setup. Okada divided the actors into two groups of three members each and tried some very simple direction such as getting on and off stage, speaking while standing, and speaking while sitting. Watching and listening from his home studio in London, Fujikura appeared to experiment with applying various compositions to the real-time video.

The following is an exchange during the performance by SHIIBASHI Ayana, KAWASAKI Mariko, and AOYAGI Izumi's group.

**Shiibashi:** I acted as if I were listening to the music, but that made it difficult to concentrate on the script. The music is “present.” I wonder what it means to be intertwined with that.

**Okada:** Instead of trying to approach the music, I imagine that the music will become intertwined all on its own if you grasp the core of the script, which is already beside you. It's important for this image of intertwining to end up being visible to the audience.

**Fujikura:** It'll probably stand out even more when there's actually a space for the musicians, won't it?

**Okada:** As long as the actors move in a good way, the musicians will naturally notice it. In this case, won't the actors and musicians look like they're dancing? I think that would be very funny. It would be great.

The relationship between music, movement, and words is a theme also explored in *Super Premium Soft Double Vanilla Rich*. The work uses all 48 preludes and fugues of Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1*, which strongly take on the characteristics of “shackles” constantly tethering the play and the actors' performances to a certain frame. The work's dramaturgy lies in the superimposition of this with the sophisticatedly managed setting of a convenience store and, by extension, the state of Japanese society. However, Okada said that he was pursuing a more organic relationship with music in the current work. The receptive sensibility of “the music becoming intertwined all on its own” certainly seemed to differ from the passivity of *Super Premium*.

**Fujikura:** If you think of each musical composition as an “island,” you can lie in wait for the sound by creating stopping points in between, which we call “pauses.” This makes the music more elastic as well. It's one of the properties of live music.

Repeated attempts were made to assign six different compositions to each of the six actors, start the music in the middle of a line or ahead of speech, and so on. Thus, the workshop moved into the next day.



**Okada:** Yesterday, I formulated the hypothesis that as long as the performances are good, the sound will become intertwined with them. Today, I want to try “listening to the music” more intently or “taking a more passive role.” The music is always audible—always reaches your ears. You can listen even when you’re not taking a break, so you don’t need to take a break to listen, but I want to try “taking a break to listen.”

What Okada may have meant by this was to convert non-speaking time into “listening time” or “rests.” Naturally, the actors were to continue various movements at these times as well. However, the momentary rests accentuated the central theme of the work, “inside” and “outside,” and more specifically the existence of the “house” that the characters want to protect from external enemies and that they feel is being invaded. Okada emphasized that he wanted to share the “presence” of this fictional space with the audience and entrench it in their imaginations. Following this, ASAKURA Chieko, OMURA Wataru, and YAZAWA Makoto performed as a group.

**Yazawa:** I thought that it would be really hard to act out “sharing with the audience” like you said, but it felt like there was something maintained by the music even without me doing anything on my part.

**Okada:** I think it’s fine to feel a sense of reassurance from the music. It’s like Spider-Man coming to save you even if you fall off a building.

**Fujikura:** The chattering-like clarinet composition fits Yazawa’s part so well that I thought, “This is it!” The composition feels like a component of the lines.

**Okada:** One might say that they’re just pauses, but I feel like they really create a sense of singing. At the same time, it’s not just to do with the sound. I think that it’s connected to performing the work as something incomplete by giving the impression of fluctuations in the actors’ awareness. At one point, I had a plan to fabricate musicality by making the actors string out their vowels, but now I’ve realized that it’s completely unnecessary.

It seemed important to note that the sharing of images with the audience through pauses is not a means of emphasizing the transmissive intent to make the audience listen to something in particular. The intervals that were extended in order to entrench the fiction highlighted by the play that “this is our house” as something “present” would not provide answers to the audience, but rather reveal a space for questioning.

**Okada:** Unless we open it up to the audience like this, I think that the music, that is, the playing will become mere background music.

Only two days remained of the first series of workshops, and this was the final day that I was able to observe. However, the experimentation would continue. Fujikura commented on the play *Never Given*, which was updated and grew in length daily.

**Fujikura:** As the work will be over one hour long by the time it premieres in Vienna in 2023, it’s probably better if there are fixed rules for Okada, the actors and musicians, and me. In terms of the orchestration, I think that a clarinet and string quartet will be most effective.

However, because of the length, I’m agonized by wanting to construct the music. Normally, I wouldn’t take the classical approach of sandwiching the music between the same themes at the beginning and end, but as this is musical theater, it might be a chance to do just that.

There was also mention of the presence or absence of music in a manner linked to the discussion of “pauses” in the previous day’s performances. Assuming the strength of the structure of the music and the concept supporting it, “looping” could be used to broadly establish three categories: “lines over the music,” “no music,” and “musically static.” Fujikura suggested that by shuffling these, a natural structure could be created while accentuating a pulse-like tempo. Based on his suggestions, parts without music were added to the performance. Some roles were also swapped between male and female actors.

**Fujikura:** It might not be necessary to aggressively attach meaning to the “absence” of music. Also, a major discovery for me personally is the fact that male and female performers give a very different feel to the performance. My music tends to be in the upper register, so it’s prone to clashing with female voices. That’s what I tried to avoid in my compositions, but there were some parts that I felt were questionable. As a future policy, it would be good if we could settle which lines are spoken by male or female actors.

**Okada:** Let’s do that. In the production that we rehearsed last month (*Yuzuru*), there were also problems with the ranges of the actors or singers, making some parts difficult to hear.

**Fujikura:** In opera, that’s a constant issue. Japanese pop has a strong tendency to actively pit the instrumentals and backing vocals against the main female vocals, generating conflict. But what I want to achieve is coexistence between the two—a state in which this coexistence occurs spontaneously.

While updating the central axis of the acting was a point of contention in the earlier July workshops, the later ones developed the performances overall by exploring their relationship to the music. Through these workshops, it seemed as if Okada’s very concept for *Music Theatre Production* was greatly expanded. The play, which started as the story of a core “family,” had previously given the feeling that the six characters would survive until the end. However, amid the antagonism between the music and performances, the family (or community resembling one) exited early, and its presence ceased to be a problem. In other words, as Okada predicted, human matters were no longer the central theme.

Non-anthropocentrism is a hot topic in many areas of contemporary art, science, and philosophy, but insofar as it is grasped by the European standards of the modern era and later, it remains a matter of humans (and deities or faith). Similarly, insofar as it deals with the abstraction and embodiment of diverse human behavior, it is difficult for theater to become fully divorced from human existence. However, rather than uncritically

foregrounding his reliable method of “imagination” and “conception of imagery,” Okada attempted to envision a new form of musical theater based on unrefined (in a positive sense) collaboration between the music and actors in this workshop, filling it with creative potential and anticipation. The next would be in November.

### Resumption of workshops after the premier of *Yuzuru*

About three months had passed since the previous workshop. The originally scheduled work-in-progress performance in Vienna, Austria, was quickly abandoned and switched to a second series of workshops and work-in-progress performance at Tower Hall Funabori in Edogawa, Tokyo. In the meantime, Okada had experienced directing his first operatic work, *Yuzuru* (premiered in 2021). The workshops were resumed only two days after the premiere.

**Okada:** Back in July, I said that I wanted to create something that wasn't opera without knowing much about opera. But after directing *Yuzuru*, the meaning and texture of “not opera” have changed greatly for me. In a way, it's like I've just gotten back from the land of opera and am suffering from jetlag, but I think that's definitely a good place to start.

When I asked the actors who had watched the Tokyo performance two days prior about their impressions, one by one they shared realizations connected to the relationship between the performances and music as explored in the July workshops. “I was surprised that the singing sounded more like lines than I'd imagined. It was also interesting how the singers interacted with the music onstage” (Yazawa). “I practice *rokyoku* (recitation of stories accompanied by shamisen playing), so I really want to be able to achieve narrating the verses instead of singing them. The opera did that” (Shiibashi).

**Okada:** Singing and music tend to be thought of as abstract, but *Yuzuru* reminded me that opera has concrete storylines and roles. The emotions of the actors or singers are expressed through the singing and music, so you could think of them as lines.

The way I see it, opera is a format suited to starting from “what to imagine” like we did in the past workshops, because the music carries the “emotional” aspect of the work. The actors' movements and acting are in yet another layer.

Looking back on the production of *Yuzuru*, Okada said that while there were certainly moments when he was tempted to have the actors or singers themselves express the emotions represented by the music, doing so would have led the music and actors to clash, missing his original aims.

Writing this report after the fact, I hypothesize that concretely building up the comprehensive nature of the act of drama and then clearly dividing those elements into layers so that they run side by side may be the foundation of Okada's creative work. For example, while working on *Pratthana – A Portrait of Possession* with its original author, Thai novelist Uthis HAEMAMOOL, and scenographer TSUKAHARA Yuya of contact Gonzo, I heard Okada himself make statements to the effect that his directing in that play was fairly conservative. However, I feel like this was due to the scale of production of *Pratthana* being the largest that he had ever worked on. With the main line that moves the narrative along being

the scope of the original author and the decorative and formative aspects that constitute the muscle and fat of the work being that of the scenographer, Okada's task of embodying the drama as the playwright and director naturally converged, or shrank, into a limited domain. Although it is, of course, the role of the director to synthesize these divided elements along the timeline of the performance, they are synthesized in a realer sense by each audience member. (This is where the issues of imagination and conception of imagery mentioned by Okada enter the foreground.) It goes without saying that this broadly collaborative aspect is the reason why not only Okada, but all physical artists emphasize the presence of the audience. Theater is “something created collectively.”

Nonetheless, what Okada idealizes may not be uniaxial collaboration in which the boundary between the self and the other becomes ambiguously fused, evoking a living organism or blood ties, but rather a state of (a) synchronous collaboration with the individual outlines or sharp distinctions of the director as director, the actors as actors, and the musicians as musicians kept solid and yet running side by side in the same direction. His previously mentioned statement that “the actors' movements and acting are in yet another layer,” as well as the dialogues that took place at the workshops previously described in this report, appear to be potential evidence of that. In Okada's case, his awareness of the collective/cooperative in theater prescribes not only the state of organization but also his own creative grammar.

Returning to the topic of *Yuzuru*, Okada spoke as follows about opera and the various forms of staging derived from it.

**Okada:** In addition to the concert format, opera can apparently also be performed as just singers singing, without a set or costumes. It's said that many opera fans prefer that. But I feel like that's totally wrong. In opera, there's music that can't be heard unless it's staged narratively with the singers present as actors.

As Fujikura's music is really strong, I want to make that strength audible. I hope that I can make the actors and audience aware of it so that it comes through even more by watching the performance. That's the goal for the next four days of workshops—how the music will change when the layer of imagination is created.

My first report introduced OUKI Tamiko and Okada's recognition of “chelfitsch as a laboratory.” For me, the word “laboratory” conjures up the image of “a vessel for things that are less than the finished work.” It also suggests room for a large number of unspecified people from various backgrounds to become involved. This is truly how the creation of *Music Theatre Production* can be put into perspective.

Does this mean that once the results of the experiment are given explicit form, the name “chelfitsch” has completed its role? In some ways, that may be the case. After experimentation through chelfitsch, Okada uses his personal name, “Okada Toshiki,” because it is backed by his directorial success and its reproducibility—in other words, his directing abilities (although I believe that this is usually an external decision by the other parties who commission Okada rather than his own choice). At the other end of the spectrum, projects that maintain an experimental nature, such as *Eraser Mountain* and *EIZO-Theater*, proactively use the name “chelfitsch.”

However, in the case of a work such as *Pratthana* where the three names “Uthis Haemamool,” “Okada Toshiki,” and “Tsukahara Yuya” are placed side by side, I feel like Okada's individual role as director becomes conceptually isolated from the others (it is because it is sufficiently isolated that effective collaboration with others is possible), and his self-aware-

ness of grasping the overall work as a “playwright” is already abandoned by the time of the performance, when the work is widely shared with audiences. It is somewhere within the production process transitioning from “chelfitsch” to “Okada Toshiki” that the moment arrives in which the identity of “playwright Okada Toshiki” is outlined. It may be the identity named by the phenomenon that occurs in the moments of encounters and collisions between different values and layers as seen in *Music Theatre Production* and *Yuzuru*, as well as in the aftermath when those layers are progressively divided to run side by side in the quest for imaginary synthesis.



Photo: KATO Kazuya