

SHIGA Lieko, Merzbow, Balázs PÁNDI (Hungary), and Richard PINHAS (France)

“Merzbow, Balázs Pándi & Richard Pinhas with Lieko Shiga: ‘Bipolar’” Second Report: Rehearsals at the Theater

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Arrival of the Video Footage at the Theater

After the runup that I described in my first report, final checks prior to the actual performances were conducted on October 6 and 7 at the performance venue, Kyoto Art Theater Shunjuza. I was able to attend both days, watching the work mainly from the audience seats.

Lighting staff began prep work on the morning of October 6. When I entered the theater after 4:00 p.m., a special video operating booth had already been installed in front of the entrance to the actors' waiting room in the lowest tier of seats, and SHIGA Lieko and SATO Takahiro (video shooting and editing technical support) were working in front of a monitor. The lighting prep finished around 4:50 p.m., and a run-through of just the video began at 5:00 p.m.

When the footage that I had seen at Shiga's studio in Miyagi was actually projected onto the screen to be used for the performances, the impact was overwhelming even in the vast space of Shunjuza. The footage began with breathtaking video of waves processed into red tones and projected across the entirety of the massive 22-meter-wide screen. This was followed by video of a number of people walking on top of a seawall, as if hurried along by something. On the other hand, I also noticed slight differences from what I had seen in Miyagi. Theatrical lighting that had not been present in Shiga's studio cut across the screen, and it seemed like the contrast of the video was somewhat weaker. Balancing video and lighting, two different kinds of “light,” has long been pointed out as difficult. However, it is even more important in this work because the success or failure of the “video” is so key.

The run-through finished in about an hour, followed by a meeting between theater staff including the stage manager and the video team. Shiga conveyed to the staff that she wanted to properly show footage of people walking at various speeds for the first 15 minutes. She also shared with them that the fades to white and black that occurred about

once each during the course of the hour would serve as major breaks in the progression of the footage. During this time, TSUKAHARA Yuya, representing the planning side, was constantly near the video operating booth engaging in detailed exchanges with Shiga.

Combining the Music and Video

The musicians finally joined the others at the theater on October 7. Their arrival was preceded by another run-through of just the video starting at 3:00 p.m. At first glance, the footage had a completely different feel from the previous day, which surprised me. Defining aspects such as the redness and blueness of the light, the gritty feel of the surface, and the depth of the pitch blackness in the background loomed with overwhelming clarity. The edges of the lighting for the musicians and footlights had been clearly isolated from the light of the video screen through close technical coordination, making the entire stage look very vibrant. When I checked with Shiga after the run-through, she said that she “had tried varying the brightness in different ways during yesterday's run-through but adjusted it as little as possible today.” She herself was testing out various possibilities ahead of the performances.

Meanwhile, Richard PINHAS (guitar) came onstage at 3:20 p.m., with Balázs PÁNDI (drums) and AKITA Masami joining him by 4:15 p.m. For a while, the three musicians were absorbed in checking their instruments and equipment. The positions of the “musicians' video monitors” are an important aspect of this work. As each musician will essentially be facing forward during the performances, they will be unable to look directly at the massive screen behind them. Thus, they will need to check what kind of footage is playing behind them by using monitors on the floor of the stage. The space around each musician was crammed with musical equipment and speakers, so the optimal positions were determined through detailed arrangements with the theater staff. Pándi checked the volume level of each drum such as the bass drum, the snare, and so on with the sound engineer.

The musicians finally began playing at 4:40 p.m. The sound from the specially installed speakers was incredibly loud, but also very clear. During this time, Shiga would occasionally walk over to the center of the audience seating and check the balance between the sound and video while testing out various footage. At 5:10 p.m., Tsukahara, using a microphone, told the musicians he wanted to share the cues for the start and ending of the video. Next, Shiga explained the general progression of the video



Shiga Lieko (closer to the camera) and Sato Takahiro running checks from the video operating booth



Rehearsal with all of the musicians

in English. As expected, the impact of the video and that of the sound matched spectacularly. All of the arrangements were finished by around 6:00 p.m.

In the end, a dress rehearsal was not conducted. When I asked Tsukahara about this at a later date, he explained that he had actually been quite conflicted over whether to hold one. All of the musicians were experienced with jam sessions, so he had few concerns about their relationships, but the issue was that this was a brand-new experience for Shiga, who was joining as the “fourth improviser.” A dress rehearsal would

be a good idea for her sake. At the same time, forcing improvisational musicians without a culture of dress rehearsals to take part in one might affect their motivation toward the actual performances. The decision not to hold a dress rehearsal was in some ways a gamble. However, come to think about it, in Noh drama, which emphasizes the concept of *ichi-go ichi-e* or the transient nature of the performance, only a simple run-through is conducted on the day before the show. In that sense, the final preparations had some commonalities with traditional Japanese performing arts.



The music and video coming together for the first time



An almost full view of the stage