

SCOT (Suzuki Company of Toga) and Restu I. Kusumaningrum (Indonesia)

“Electra” First Report: Launch of Project

Author: UCHINO Tadashi

Initially there were fears that this project would be difficult to implement due to the worldwide spread of COVID-19. The project was originally scheduled to be presented during the SCOT Summer Season in the summer of 2021, but due to universally known situation, it became no longer possible to schedule. However, thanks to the professional and calm response of SCOT in Japan and their Indonesian collaborators, producer Restu Kusumaningrum and Purnati¹ staff, and their deep understanding of the artistic and art historical importance of this project, which is more than just an international exchange, preparations are now well underway for the performance scheduled for November 27 at Toga Grand Theatre (Toga Dai-Sanbo) in Toga Art Park, Toga Village, Nanto City, Toyama Prefecture. The first meeting with both sides was held remotely via Zoom on October 22. At that time, the Indonesian actors had already arrived in Japan and were already in Toga Village, SCOT's home base, where the production is to be staged, and in self-isolation.

The following is mainly a summary of a presentation given by the Indonesian side (by Restu) at the meeting, translated from English into Japanese (the Japanese translation was done by the author), interspersed with comments noting my impressions at this point.

1st Meeting (Using Zoom)

October 22, 2021, 2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.

Participants: SHIGEMASA Yoshie (SCOT production), Restu Kusumaningrum (producer, Singapore²), Wiwit Roswita (Purnati manager, Jakarta), Anak Agung Iswara (interpreter, Bali), Uchino Tadashi (observer)

The project has encountered various difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the Indonesian actors have finally been able to come to Japan, the schedule for the performance on November 27 has been set, and the first meeting to explain the project to the author was held via Zoom, connecting Japan, Indonesia, and Singapore.

First, Shigemasa of SCOT gave an overview of the project and described the purpose for the day, followed by a more than 30-minute presentation on the project by the producer, Restu. The following is a summary of that presentation.

The following 12 people are participating in this project from the Indonesian side:

Jamaluddin Latif (Actor, Yogyakarta)
 Dian Nova Saputra (Actor, Trenggalek)
 Washadi (Actor, Jakarta/Brebes)
 Erik Nofriwandi (Actor, Padang Panjang)
 Wahyu Kurnia (Actor, Lombok)
 Ahmad Ridwan Fadjri (Actor, Padang Panjang)
 Andhini Puteri Lestari (Actress, Jakarta)
 Bambang Prihadi (Training Director/Actor, Jakarta)
 Agatha Irena Praditya (Actress, Yogyakarta)
 Anak Agung Iswara (Interpreter, Bali)
 Wiwit Roswita (Administrator, Jakarta)
 Restu I. Kusumaningrum (Producer, Singapore)

1. Intensive training at Purnati, April 10–24, 2021

Conducted in Jakarta with 15 invited actors/performers

Purpose: To enrich the vocabulary of physical expression and to identify potential actors for *Electra*

Program Content:

- Lecture on philosophy through Javanese dance by an expert on Javanese culture invited from the University of Indonesia
- Saman, an Acehese dance for the organic connection of the senses
- Martial arts of West Sumatra
- The soft movements of the Pakarena dance of South Sulawesi
- Basics of Balinese dance for women and men
- Introduction to the Suzuki Training Method
- Voice training through text reading in each person's native language
- Viewing of videos of SCOT, Indonesian, and international performing arts
- Exchange with invited professional actors, directors, and writers

2. *Electra* audition, April 22, 2021

15 actors participated and the following six were selected:

1. Washadi (performed in *Dionysus*³) 2. Erik Nofriwandi 3. Wahyu Kurnia 4. Ahmad Ridwan Fadjri 5. Andhini Puteri Lestari 6. Agatha Irena Praditya

The following three actors who were in the Indonesian version of *Dionysus* were also invited:

7. Jamaluddin Latif 8. Dian Nova Saputra 9. Bambang Prihadi

These are the nine people who were offered roles in *Electra*.

3. Training program for the selected actors

a. May–June

Regular Zoom meetings with Restu

Viewing SCOT performance recordings

Suzuki Training Method training every Wednesday and Saturday at Pro Art Space

(Participants: Washadi, Andhini, Sarah, and via Zoom, Agatha, Erik, Ridwan, and Wahyu)

b. July: Training

Suzuki Training Method training at Pro Art Space from Monday to Saturday every week

7:00 a.m.–8:00 a.m. Morning session / 4:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m. Afternoon session

(Participants: Washadi, Andhini, Erik, Ridwan)

Meditation and text readings at the studio (in Indonesian, at Jampang Farming Studio)

c. July: Actors

Erik and Ridwan (Padang Panjang, West Sumatra) flew to Jakarta on June 30 (Tuesday–Thursday) Administrative work at the Purnati office of Pro Art Space

(Friday–Monday) Outdoor activities for physical strengthening [agriculture, gardening, fishing, and renovation of Jampang Farming Studio (painting, cooking, building an outdoor theater)]

d. August

Agatha (Yogyakarta) took the train to Jakarta

Wahyu (Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara) flew to Bali

Suzuki Training Method training (instructed by Restu, Bali Purnati), then flew to Jakarta on August 1

All except Jamaluddin and Dian Nova gathered on August 2

Training Schedule for *Electra*

- August 2–25: Suzuki Training Method training at Pro Art Space

Monday–Saturday, 7:00 a.m.–8:00 a.m. Morning session / 4:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m. Afternoon session
 Wednesday and Thursday: Training by Bambang
 Viewing of *Electra* video
 <Intensive training in the Suzuki Training Method>
 • August 26–September 5
 Quarantine/isolation at Jampang Farming Studio, 1.5 hours away from Jakarta
 Participating actors: *Electra* team (Erik, Wahyu, Ridwan, Anghini, Agatha), five *Dionysus* participants (Aditia, Anwari, Dexara, Sarah, Washadi), plus five new actors invited from Java and Sumatra
 Led by Bambang, assisted by Washadi
 Introduction of the Suzuki Training Method for new actors, training for the participants of *Electra* and *Dionysus*
 • September 1–October 10
 Jamaluddin and Dian Nova fly to Jakarta
 Quarantine: At Jampang Farming Studio (outside Jakarta)
 Preparation for the Toga Program began on September 13
 • September 13–October 3
 Suzuki Training Method training at Jampang Farming Studio
 Readings of the script of *Electra* in Indonesian and four local languages
 Wheelchair training
 Sunday–Friday
 10:00 a.m.–12:00 a.m. Morning session
 2:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m. Afternoon session
 6:30 p.m.–8:30 p.m. Evening session
 Led by Bambang, assisted by Dian Nova and Washadi

Preparation for Departure
 October 5–11
 Oct. 5: Move to Pro Art Space (Jakarta)
 Oct. 6–8: Conventional training
 Oct. 9: PCR test at Japanese medical institution
 Oct. 11: Departure for Japan

Health Considerations

- COVID-19
 Two vaccinations completed
 PCR and antigen testing conducted prior to training participation
 Weekly antigen testing with Purnati staff
 Infection prevention measures: Wearing masks, hand washing, social distance
- Quarantine
 Quarantine (disinfection) system: Various facilities in Purnati
 From August 2
 Pro Art Space, Jampang Farming Studio, Bali Purnati Art Center

Restrictive measures taken in August for COVID-19 forced all actors to move to Jampang Farming Studio, an hour and a half from Jakarta

The Casting Decision Process for *Electra*

1. Auditions were held and recorded in Jakarta on April 22.
2. Videos of the auditions with Restu's comments were sent to SCOT for review.
3. The results were communicated to Restu, and after discussion, the actors were selected.

4. The final casting was decided by Suzuki after the rehearsals in Toga had begun (this part was based on information provided by Shigemasa).

Impressions after Listening to the Presentation

Although the author has not yet been able to visit the site due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was understood through the first meeting discussed in this report that the project is overcoming various difficulties and progressing extremely well.

I think I met the producer Restu for the first time in Toga Village in the early spring of 2015. No one would dispute the fact that Suzuki Tadashi is a world-class director, but Restu was not a producer who simply appreciates Suzuki's works highly. I remember that she came to Japan to ask Suzuki to stage an international co-production with Indonesia in order to somehow contribute to the modernization and revitalization of the performing arts in Indonesia, where Restu is from. Of course, there are many such requests, and it would be impossible to fulfill all of them, but Suzuki accepted Restu's request, and a relationship was slowly built over time. The result was performances of *Dionysus*, one of Suzuki's best-known works. As already noted, it was performed during the SCOT Summer Season from August to September 2018.

In this production, the roles of Cadmus and the chorus were played by Indonesian actors. After its premiere at Toga Grand Theatre in Toga Art Park, the play was also performed in a special open-air theater in the Prambanan Temple Compounds in Indonesia. During the 9th Theatre Olympics the following year, the play was performed again at Maezawa Garden in Kurobe City, Toyama Prefecture, and at the open-air theater in Toga Art Park.

Dionysus, one of Suzuki's representative works, has not only been staged in more than 20 countries, but has also become known for being performed by a wide variety of actors. In the version that was performed this time, the Indonesian actors who played the chorus spoke in their own dialects, which was a major feature of the production. The actors, who already had high physical abilities, further enhanced their potential as actors through training in the Suzuki Training Method. Their ability to successfully present the image of a group of people from different cultures with different sounds/languages, who grouped together in a religious fervor to incite the masses, was most impressive.

It is anticipated from the casting that Indonesian actors will be even more important in this production of *Electra*. In my next report, I hope to attend rehearsals in Toga Village one week before the performance and interview the actors, if possible.

1 Purnati is an arts production organization headed by Restu and has facilities in Bali and Jakarta, including residency rehearsal studios and theaters. It covers not only theater but also dance, music, fine arts, and a wide range of other art forms (according to information provided by Shigemasa).

2 Restu, the producer, is based in Indonesia, but also travels back and forth to Singapore. She stayed in Indonesia (Bali or Jakarta) for most of the audition and rehearsal period of *Electra* to organize and manage this project and to train the actors. Because the actors went to Singapore just before coming to Japan, the October 22 Zoom meeting was attended from Singapore (this part of the information was provided by Shigemasa). The other participants live in Indonesia, but not necessarily in well-known cities such as Jakarta or Yogyakarta.

3 This is the second collaboration between Indonesian actors and SCOT. The first was the three-year-long production of *Dionysus*, which welcomed actors from Indonesia and was performed at Toga Art Park (Toga Grand Theatre) from August to September 2018, and again at the end of September in the Prambanan Temple Compounds in Indonesia. As will be explained later, this was a long three-year collaboration, and the trust built at that time with the Indonesian side is thought to have made the current project during the COVID-19 pandemic possible.

SCOT (Suzuki Company of Toga) and Restu I. Kusumaningrum (Indonesia)

“Electra” Second Report: Rehearsal

Author: UCHINO Tadashi

As noted in the first report, initially there were fears that this project would be difficult to implement due to the global spread of COVID-19. Although it was no longer possible to conduct the project according to the prior performance schedule, the group decided to accelerate its preparations for the performance scheduled for November 27, 2021, at Toga Grand Theatre (Toga Dai-Sanbo) in Toga Art Park, Toga Village, Nanto City, Toyama Prefecture. The first meeting with both sides, discussed in the first report, was held remotely via Zoom on October 22. At that time, the Indonesian actors had already arrived in Japan (October 11) and were in Toga Village, SCOT's home base, where the performance is scheduled to take place, and were self-isolating.

As the international co-production *Electra* will be rehearsed and performed at Toga Art Park, which has excellent facilities, some facilities were available for the members from Indonesia to self-isolate. Therefore, the 11 members who came to Japan spent the self-isolation period (14 days) in the Toga Village facility without any particular problems, and rehearsals for *Electra* began on October 26.

The author stayed in Toga Village from the afternoon of November 18, nine days before the performance, to the morning of the following day, November 19. After arriving, I observed a full rehearsal of *Electra* on the afternoon of the 18th, and then had the opportunity to interview three of the actors. In the evening, I also saw a rehearsal of *Shinpan: Tsugaru Kaikyo Fuyugeshiki* (Isolated Landscape in Winter – New Version), which is scheduled to be performed together with *Electra*. In the morning of the following day, the 19th, I was able to observe the Indonesian actors' training in the Suzuki Training Method, followed by a part of their independent rehearsal of *Electra*.

Those interviewed on the afternoon of November 18 were Bambang Prihadi, who is the assistant director of *Electra* and plays the role of the doctor; Andhini Puteri Lestari, who plays *Electra*; and Jamaluddin Latif, who plays Orestes. The interview was conducted in Indonesian. The interpreter was Anak Agung Iswara, and Wiwit Roswita from production and SHIGEMASA Yoshie of SCOT were also present. The following is a summary of the interview.

Bambang is an artist with his own theater company in Indonesia. In 2015, he came to Toga for the first time under a Japan Foundation program and stayed at SCOT for 40 days to experience the Suzuki Training Method. He had read about the method in books, but when he actually experienced it, he says that he understood that it is even more wonderful than what he had gained by reading. Since then, he has continued his relationship with SUZUKI Tadashi. The method itself has been taught in Indonesia since 2002 by artists from the Indonesian theater company Theater Garasi who studied the method in Toga and brought it back to Indonesia, but it is since 2015 that the method has finally been taught there in earnest. The producer of *Electra*, Restu, understood the essence of the method and created a system to teach it in Indonesia, using the spaces of Purnati, which she presides over, and other locations. Bambang also began to use the method in his own theater company, Ciputat (Jakarta).

According to Bambang, in Indonesia, each theater company has its own method of training actors, and nothing systematic has ever been taught

except at universities. He believes that the Suzuki Training Method has spread in Indonesia not only because it is systematic, but also because anyone who actually tries it understands immediately that it is good for actors. The way of concentration and the way of using the body in the method can be understood naturally and effortlessly by Indonesian actors, and anyone can understand that this is a method necessary to become a good actor.

Andhini had the opportunity to perform in a Robert Wilson production in 2018, for which she received training in the Suzuki Training Method from Bambang as well as Indonesian actors who appeared in *Dionysus*. She became interested in the method at that time and tried to participate in the summer school scheduled to be held in Toga in the summer of 2020, but unfortunately it was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When 2021 came around, she heard that there was an audition for *Electra*, so she joined it and was hired. Andhini has been participating in a theater company called Teater Koma since 2005, which does not necessarily emphasize the physicality of the actors, focusing instead on spoken drama. After experiencing the Suzuki Training Method, she came to realize that she could not speak her lines properly without training her bodily senses. Therefore, she intends to continue the training as much as possible.

Jamaluddin, who played the main role of Cadmus in *Dionysus*, says that he first encountered the Suzuki Training Method in Australia way back in 1994. At that time, the instructor did not call it the Suzuki Training Method; it was just something that the Australians were doing. But Jamaluddin was interested, and when he researched it, he found that it was the Suzuki Training Method. He was a member of Theater Garasi, one of Indonesia's leading theater companies, from 1997 to 2011, where he also had the opportunity to experience the Suzuki Training Method. What he understood there was that the method is designed to help actors acquire the necessary physicality. If actors do not have control of their bodies, they will not be able to convey anything to the audience when they are on stage. Jamaluddin believes that by developing a sense of body through the method, it is possible to acquire such a body.

According to Jamaluddin, the reason the Suzuki Training Method has spread in Indonesia is that, like Bambang said, it is an easy-to-understand method that shows actors how to acquire what their bodies need. He said that he felt that his performance in *Electra* was, in a sense, an opportunity to experience the “real” Suzuki Training Method, and that he considers it to be a very valuable opportunity.

Afterward, the author, understanding the importance of the Suzuki Training Method for the Indonesian actors, asked how they feel it comes out in actual productions.

According to Bambang, what he learned in training is directly applied on stage, as shown by his ability to respond physically to Suzuki's direction, for example. In other words, training and the stage are linked. Furthermore, Bambang also said that his performance in *Electra* has made him understand that the combination of Suzuki's direction and the Suzuki Training Method is the probably the most appropriate way to convey to people the various tragic situations of the contemporary world.

Andhini, in response to the same question, said that since she is playing the role of *Electra*, she has experienced that the elements of the Suzuki Training Method, from body movement to breathing and concentration, play an extremely important role. In Indonesian contemporary theater, acting that relies on emotion tends to take precedence, but in theater based on the Suzuki Training Method, it is important to convey emotion without losing the form of the body, and she believes that she is gradually becoming able to do this.

For Jamaluddin, the Suzuki Training Method was initially a tough experience that put a lot of strain on his body, but as he continued the training, he found that when he actually went on stage, his body was stronger and his sense of balance was sharpened, so that even in situations where he does not speak, he says that he is able to maintain his body's strength. The body is acting.

Finally, I asked what the most difficult part of the project is, given that it is an international collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Bambang, Indonesia was in a critical situation where the spread of the virus resulted in lockdowns, and for nearly two years, people had been unable to work in groups like they had before. He believes that it is important for people to meet in person, and in theater as well, new ideas are created when people come together and talk, but he has experienced that this is extremely unlikely to happen online. He said that he is grateful that this project gave him the same opportunity as two years ago to physically interact with people and create something.

Andhini responded that she was even moved by the fact that she is able to give normal performances in front of an audience. The only difficulty was that she could not train during the initial 14-day quarantine period. As she had been training in Indonesia before coming to Japan, training itself became difficult after the quarantine period, but with the support of those around her, she managed to get in shape to perform on stage.

Jamaluddin told me that he thinks it is very important, in the midst of the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, that a new version of *Electra* is being created through this international co-production. He said that the presence of an audience is, above all, a treasure in this situation. Although the 14 days of quarantine were also difficult for Jamaluddin, he also had some interesting experiences during the quarantine period, such as drawing the sketches shown in the attached document, and communicating with the staff through the drawings.

The above is the content of the interview. The Suzuki Training Method is spreading worldwide, and the most interesting fact was that the Indonesian actors felt that it was the best method for them. After this, I witnessed the actors' performances from rehearsals to the live show, and everyone was amazed that they had reached this level of performance in such a short period of time. The fact that the actors trained for the performance before coming to Japan, went through the quarantine period, and had a series of extremely stressful rehearsals in Suzuki's watchful presence, may have been a major factor in their performances reaching a high level. However, it also seems to be related to the fact that the Suzuki Training Method is, in the first place, an extremely compatible training method for the Indonesian actors' methodology and aesthetics of theater and for their physicality.

This and other aspects of the performance of *Electra* itself will be discussed in detail in the next report.



From Jamaluddin's notes during his self-isolation period (photos by the author)