

Company Derashinera with LEE Ren Xin (Malaysia) and LIU Juichu (Taiwan)

“TOGE” Third Report: Performance

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Derashinera’s project was composed of two parts: **TOGE Atrium** (free of charge) at the Kanagawa Arts Theatre (KAAT) and **TOGE theater performances** in the KAAT Middle Studio. After about two weeks of rehearsals in a KAAT atelier (rehearsal studio), the performances were held in December on the following schedule.

- 5th: 1:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m. Full-size rehearsal with actual props in the atrium
- 6th: 10:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m. Rehearsal
- 7th: 10:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m. Rehearsal
- 8th: Rehearsal, followed by
1:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m. Preparation in the atelier
From 8:00 p.m. Atrium performance dress rehearsal
- 9th: 10:00 a.m.–3:30 p.m. Preparation in the atelier
17:00 **TOGE Atrium**
- 10th: 10:00 a.m.–3:30 p.m. Preparation in the atelier
5:00 p.m. **TOGE Atrium**
- 11th: 10:00 a.m.–3:30 p.m. Preparation in the atelier
5:00 p.m. **TOGE Atrium**
- 14th: No rehearsal, stage setting begins
- 15th: 1:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m. Stage rehearsal
- 16th: 1:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m. Stage rehearsal
- 17th: After dress rehearsal
5:00 p.m. **TOGE theater performance**
- 18th: 11:30 a.m.–12:00 a.m. Notes (criticism)
1:00 p.m. & 5:00 p.m. **TOGE theater performance**
- 19th: 1:00 p.m. **TOGE theater performance**

1. TOGE Atrium Performances

December 9, the first day of the atrium performances. Despite the fact that it was a 30-minute performance on a weekday evening, an audience of about 30 attended. As in the theater performance, a long rubber band is stretched out to establish a space. The difference is that the platform used is wrapped in plastic and a huge plastic bag is prepared under it.

When the show opened, KAJIHARA Akiko, LEE Ren Xin, SAKIYAMA Rina, LIU Juichu, and FUJITA Momoko appeared on stage. The five move inside the taut rubber band. Amid the sounds of livestock and chirping birds, an apple is brought in, and as one person tries to pick it up, the other members interrupt her for a while. Eventually, Fujita succeeds in picking it up, and the apple is passed to the other members one by one……

The fixed rubber band is released by ONODERA Shuji, and the women move to handle it like a communal boat, a movement also used in the theater performances. Eventually, the huge plastic bag is blown up from under the platform, and the women divide into those who walk on the bag that moves like a wave, those who go inside the bag, and those who dance outside it. Before long, Liu films Sakiyama dancing, which is shown on a monitor in real time. Liu and Sakiyama enter the plastic bag that has expanded to cover the entire acting area. The audience sees their silhouettes reflected on the bag and the video on the monitor. Inside the bag, lights are used to create a fantastic atmosphere.

But with an impact sound, the fantastic time is over; the performers

pack up the plastic bag, return it under the platform, and leave.

This atrium performance, while using elements of the theater performance, was not a mere presentation, but rather a 30-minute piece that allowed the audience to let their imaginations run free. And yet, when I saw the theater performance afterward, it had been manipulated so as to add a different interpretation and image from what had been seen in the atrium.



View of the atrium before the show (photos by the author)

2. Notes (Criticism) after First TOGE Theater Performance

The first theater performance was held on the 17th, and before the two performances on the 18th, Onodera gave his notes (criticism) of the first day.

He mainly went over a few scenes, named for convenience as “Flesh,” “The Fly,” “Dream Scene,” and so on. They reconfirmed the stage cues for the “Flesh” scene, where Lee, who has fallen down and is lying on the ground, is surrounded by Fujita, Sakiyama, Liu, and Kajihara and, before one knows it, turns into a lump of flesh. In this production, the performers and staff often move together in real time by means of cues. After the opening day of the show, they reviewed and redetermined when the staff would give cues based on which performer moved at what timing, whether the cues would be visible to the other performers, or whether it would be more logical to give cues based on another performer.

In “The Fly,” Liu chases away a fly, and various patterns were tried for how the sound would reverberate at that time.

The “Dream Scene” is one in which the performers hide behind some furniture, and while the furniture moves alone, Lee sits in a chair and then slowly slides down from and gets back up on a table. On the first day, music was played from the beginning, but it was changed to a silent start. By doing so, the sense of mystery slowly increases. However, the loss of sound necessitated new cueing, so the arrangements for this were also decided.



Onodera giving his notes, and performers on stage (photo by the author)



Checking the location of papers to be blown away (photo by the author)

After Onodera's notes, stage manager IWAYA Chinatsu communicated to the performers about a scene in which the performers hang up pieces of paper and they get blown away: "I want the final positions of the paper to be here." This is because the positions of the paper determine how much they will be blown away.

Thus, even after the opening day, adjustments and changes continued until the last minute.

3. TOGE Theater Performances

December 18, the second day of the TOGE theater performance (2nd performance). As mentioned in the second report, while this work is based on George ORWELL's novel *Animal Farm*, its unique take is that it portrays *people who are unaware of their place in the world*.

As the show opens, five women face us among surveillance cameras and speakers visible on stage. Their presence is somewhat provocative, and each of them exudes a certain strength. However, the women are unaware that they are *under surveillance*. They are also monitoring each other, and if something is wrong, they warn each other with a "Shhhh!" When they move in formation, the others pull back those who are out of line. This is a scene that pops up in contemporary society as well.

Eventually, Lee collapses, and as the other four stare at her, she becomes a lump of flesh. One is surprised, one shoos away a fly that appears, and another laments. Soon, however, the people forget the tragedy and return to their daily lives as if nothing had happened.

Liu appears, wearing red high heels and carrying papers, walking unsteadily. She somehow manages to walk upright, but the wobble in her step remains. Fujita and Sakiyama fight over a piece of paper. They carry it with their bodies, crumple it up, and spread it out. Further, an apple, which was also used in the atrium performance, appears, and again people scramble over it. In a scene in which everyone stretches out a large rubber band and gets inside it, the scene unfolds with people disturbing each other in the community and restraining each other with warning coughs and other means.

These days are changed by the powerful agitation and death of a hero played by Kajihara. The life of the group shifts to a communal life in which everyone cooperates with each other. There is a peaceful scene in which Lee waters the greenery growing on a box apparatus with a watering can. One day, when all five are sitting together, a bird comes. Its chirping makes the five of them feel happy to hear what is going on outside. Gaining courage, they fight the outside world and gain a victory. From this point on, it was a repetition of gaining momentum and being cast down. The scene in which Lee, whose body was tied to a chair with plastic wrap, succeeded in escaping from the plastic wrap seemed to symbolize the sense of anxiety and accomplishment of living together communally while fighting the outside world.

Eventually, the five begin to build a tower with ropes and chairs. However, the tower is far from solid and shows the precariousness of their communal life. At the end, the tower collapses, and the five women go outside. The dance they perform together seems somewhat like a prayer. The women did not look down, but rather had turned their eyes to the distant sky.

Perhaps due to the original setting of animals, as well as the innate aura of the performers, the five cast members always seem pure and earnest, even when they quarrel with each other. Owing to the way they try their best to resist and rise up while being at the mercy of an invisible enemy, the last scene, too, seems to be more of a rebirth and affirmation than the original story, in which the animals are defeated and the community collapses miserably.

4. Interview with Iwaya Chinatsu, Stage Manager

*Interviewed after the afternoon performance on the 18th.

— You have been involved in several of Derashinera's performances in the past, haven't you?

Iwaya: I have been involved in roles such as assistant stage manager, and this is my second [of Derashinera's] production[s] as a stage manager, following *Knife*. Last time, the COVID-19 situation was serious, and everyone was nervous. On top of that, in addition to the overseas members, there was Mr. DAKEI, who is deaf, so there was a great mix of languages. But this time, both Lee and Liu can speak English. Of course, it is difficult to judge how much was conveyed properly, but both of them seemed able to grasp Onodera's English, as well as much of his Japanese, and continued the creation. I feel that the whole thing has been very natural. I myself studied abroad in the U.S. for a year when I was in high school, so I enjoy international productions like this.

— You are also a stage manager for theater productions. What is unique about Onodera's stage production?

Iwaya: In theater, there is a script, from which artists pick up visual hints and give them shape. But in dance, especially for Onodera's productions, even if there is an original story, there is no detailed script, and the pieces of the story are created according to Onodera's image. It takes time to create that art, but rehearsals go on in the meantime. This makes it difficult for the artists, as temporary props might become actual pieces in the production as they are. As the parts of a dance are created precisely while moving the equipment in a theatrical manner, it is difficult as the stage manager to consider what to do about consistency with the actual artwork while using temporary props: what can we build on, what should we keep, and what should we change?

— What is your main job during the show, and where do you do it?

Iwaya: I am backstage, either stage left or stage right. When the lights go down, I work with the performers to do scene changes such as moving equipment around, and when the "tower" is set up, I am at the end of the rope, raising and lowering it. In a normal dance performance, the stage manager's job is to decide the flow on the spot, and the rest of the time, he or she only has to support everyone and cheer them on. In the case of Derashinera, we always do things together, it seems.

— As stage manager, how would you rate the overall flow on opening night yesterday?

Iwaya: We have to get a perfect score on opening night, but everyone gets tired to one degree or another, and the more we use equipment, the more it breaks down, so the challenge is how to keep that perfect score and put on the show for the audience without accidents or injuries. To this end, I place emphasis on keeping various matters in a routine so that irregularities do not occur. Onodera always has a wealth of ideas, so time management is also an important part of my job, as I have to figure out how to fit them in within the time frame.

5. Impressions

Two "TOGE" performances by Derashinera, made possible by complex

staff and cast work.

At the atrium performances, I heard comments such as the following: “At this distance, you can even see the difference in the texture of the costumes” (Twitter); “Even though it lasted only 30 minutes, it was pleasant to see the image expand from point to line, from surface to space” (Twitter); “The movements were interesting, and even though the space was near the entrance, which tends to distract the audience’s concentration, it felt absorbing” (interview by the author).

As it is an abstracted world inspired by *Animal Farm*, in which animals revolt against the farmer, some audience members, especially at the theater performance, felt a strong sense of fear and tragedy from the sequences that reminded them of a controlled society and war, whereas others felt more humor and strength. One commenter said, “The five of them in an enclosed space are like us in the COVID-19 pandemic” (Twitter).

Perhaps the diversity of impressions could be said to symbolize the diversity of the work itself.



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