

BIRD Theatre Company TOTTORI and  
Theater Breaking Through Barriers (US)  
“Ctrl L / A Difference of Beauty”  
Second Report: Rehearsals  
MORITA Kazuyo

This report looks at the creative process of Theater Breaking Through Barriers (TBTB) during their visit to Japan. The creation for the performance took place in two parts: the first part from September 7th to 12th, and the second part from the 20th to the 23rd, with TBTB’s performance of *BRECHT ON BRECHT*, a musical theater piece about the German playwright Bertolt BRECHT, at the 15th BIRD Theatre Festival TOTTORI in-between.

Rehearsals focused especially on the new work, *A Difference of Beauty*. The cast was divided into two groups. In the first part, two female actors from TBTB and two male actors from JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre (Ann Marie MORELLI, Bree KLAUSER, ITANI Yuuta, and MIYOSHI Mahirou) performed, while in the second part, two male actors from TBTB and two female actors from JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre (Scott BARTON, Stephen DRABICKI, SHIMADA Hikaru, and ISHII Yuumi) took the stage.

The script is a mixture of Japanese and English, and it was anticipated that memorizing the lines would be challenging, so remote read-throughs were conducted before the actual face-to-face rehearsals. In addition to textual information, actors from TBTB and the BIRD Theatre Company also recorded lines, and the audio was shared with the JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre actors for practice. Two separate self-practice sessions were also held for the JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre actors.

### COVID-19 Measures

Upon arrival, antigen tests were administered to everyone. JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre has a member with underlying health conditions, so COVID-19 prevention measures were taken very seriously, such as separating toilets. TBTB has a hard-of-hearing actor, for whom lip-reading is crucial, so transparent masks were used.

### Rehearsal Content

#### First day of rehearsals (September 7, 2022)

TBTB members, who were scheduled to arrive in Tottori on the 6th, were held up at Haneda Airport due to confusion with immigration procedures and traveled to Tottori the morning of the 7th. All actors and staff



First day of rehearsals



Rehearsals

introduced themselves, and the first-half team for *A Difference of Beauty* did a read-through. Most actors had their scripts in hand. Since English and Japanese lines alternate, there was some confusion among all the actors, as they had trouble recognizing the end of their partner’s lines and understanding where they were in the script. The same issue was faced by the second-half group and continued to be a challenge until the end.

*A Difference of Beauty* was rehearsed separately under the direction of NAKASHIMA Makoto, director of JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre, and Nicholas VISELLI, director of TBTB.

In *A Difference of Beauty*, the four actors’ lines are intertwined, but each actor’s lines are essentially monologues. Viselli praised each actor for their unique physical energy and asked each one to maintain that energy from beginning to end. While the four characters exist independently, he also asked them to interact occasionally and exhibit unhindered freedom, as if in unison.

Based on this, Nakashima’s method was to have each actor deliver their entire monologue in the middle of the rehearsal. With his guidance, each actor was able to experience the emotional changes of their character and more clearly define their personality.

In the latter half of the rehearsals, Nakashima used harsh words at times to instruct actors who struggled to express emotions. As he had spoken about JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre, I strongly felt that he did not judge them solely based on their age or disabilities, but instead focused on their abilities as actors equally. I believe Nakashima's approach of questioning the "quality as an actor" suggests the direction that actors with disabilities should aim for in the future.

### Helping Each Other Within the Group

One notable aspect of this collaboration is that both TBTB and JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre have been active in theater for many years. JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre consists of actors with and without disabilities, including actors who also perform with BIRD Theatre Company. With years of accumulated experience, members naturally helped each other.

I would like to share an episode that occurred during the creation process. Itani Yuuta, an actor with JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre, has cerebral palsy and a mild speech impairment. He uses an electric wheelchair in daily life and on stage. During a rehearsal, YASUDA Maya, an actor from the BIRD Theatre Company who is also involved with JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre, suggested that he try lowering his feet from the wheelchair. He usually rests his feet on the wheelchair's footrest, but Yasuda thought that Itani's articulation would improve if he lowered his feet to the ground and pushed against it. I was impressed with this advice, as it could only come from someone who has worked with the other person for many years, knows his or her physical condition, and is able to step into the other person's territory. When moving on stage, Itani has to place his feet on the footrest. Moreover, the timing and coordination of such movements are essential. I often saw Yasuda giving advice on these things as well.

In this production, several actors with intellectual and mental disabilities are part of the JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre cast. As rehearsals progressed, the actors were asked to move while engaging in conversation, away from the script. There were detailed directions, such as "place a hand on the shoulder and make eye contact," but some JIYU Gekijo-Freedom Theatre actors seemed unfamiliar with receiving such detailed instructions, taking time to understand and occasionally appearing confused. This is likely inevitable. Some actors even said they felt "confused." In such cases, it left a lasting impression to see their fellow actors who had worked together with them offer a helping hand.