

2019 Competition I: Comments of Judges

Competition I received 208 entries, a very large number, including several skillful works that balanced mature thinking and an experimental spirit. Shimomura Yu, who won the Jury Prize and Porosus Endowment Fund – Camping 2019 Prize, questioned what ‘Japanese’ ‘contemporary dance’ is from a critical perspective not seen before—including humor. Okamoto Yu (French Embassy Prize for Young Choreographer and FITS Prize) used her advanced technique to express her subject; she presented a near-future body image integrating costume, makeup, and art. Of the two winners of the Encouragement Prize, Norimatsu Kaoru/Tetsuda Emi/Choi Myung Hyun, based on a thorough process, abstracted beauty redolent of the sublime that the dancers’ bodies, deviating from the general norms, concealed. Chen Yi En also quietly depicted an urgent personal drama through his distinctive body language. All these works had the clarity and power to appeal to the viewer; I will remember them.

Dance is an art that goes beyond eruptions of private emotions; through conceptualization, it can lead one’s own perceptions to new dimensions in the relationships between the individual and society. Rather than a ‘lovely dance’ that is consumed in a moment, I hope in the future for works of choreography that use any and all methods to shake up convention and to inspire members of the audience to question the meaning of living here and now.

Okami Sae

This year’s competition, at the video judging stage, was utterly fascinating, with a richly international and varied group of works, by performers of many ages, from many countries. I wanted to sense an overall current in the works as a whole, but was unable to sense one. The sense of excitement over the act of creating was somewhat lacking in general. In the finals, I felt the difference between two types, those who put the artistic nature and concept of the work to the fore and those who kept that out of sight. It is not a matter of which is better; but there was a considerable latitude in how they used the body itself (did they do dance-style practice or not).

The great physicality and high level of training visible in the works by participants from Hong Kong and Latvia were an approach that was extremely stimulating for the dancers. The approach with somewhat plump bodies and ordinary bodies was something of a relief but also seemed somewhat lacking. As I said in my general remarks after the jury announced the winners, I felt that at the video screening stage, I wanted more consideration given to what works lasting only a few minutes (they don’t have to be twenty minutes long) were to communicate, what they wanted to deliver. I also felt very strongly that I wanted them to hold on to that ‘power to deliver’ throughout the piece.

I hope that, after this festival is over, the contestants will seek continuing possibilities in the path of dance and will create works with a sense of their responsibility, concretely, for figuring how to attract an audience. Our dance world is not withering away; I hope that these dancers will stay with it and continue to be filled with excitement.

Kondo Ryohei

From Latvian Jana Jacuka, who incorporated contemporary circus elements in her performance, to Filipino Japhet Mari Cabling, who addressed the autistic body, this year presented a range wider than ever before in nationality, technique, and theme.

The highlight was Shimomura Yu's "Defections for beginners: The Country of Dreams." That was his first unveiling of his work in the Kanto area, but this time the performance was more nearly perfected, with the critical distance and shift from what is thought of as 'contemporary dance', the masterful, even cunning, composition. I felt a strong desire to see his other work. I am pleased that Okamoto Yu, who is a superb dancer and presented a forceful performance, was selected to receive the French Embassy Prize for Young Choreographer. I look forward to discovering what she absorbs in France and how she presents it after returning to Japan.

"The Ignited Body" by Norimatsu Kaoru/Tetsuda Emi/Choi Myung Hyun offered the stop-motion beauty of the body floating in dim light. Chen Yi En's "Self-hate" duet also made a deep emotional impression. All the other finalists' works were also fascinating, each in its own way. But, as was also the case last year, there were unfortunately no works in which the dancers' bodies themselves soared on the stage.

Hamano Fumio

I had a great opportunity once again to be part of the jury of Competition I at the Yokohama Dance Collection this year (2019).

This edition, maybe more than ever, confirms that this competition is a great opportunity for the artists coming from Japan, Asia and also Europe!

Of course, the competition is important for all these amazing artists, but we must not forget that only the fact that so many artists from so many countries gathered together means a lot and has great value.

Regarding the projects presented, I have these following words that popped up and maybe a way of giving a general impression of the Competition I as I've been asked to do: great technique, very inventive, original, poetic, ambitious..., and sometimes also: weak music choices, cliches, not knowing why they dance...but that's part of a competition....

In the end my general feeling is being very lucky seeing all these artists commit to dance, question our differences more and more, the diversity and I hope for the next edition they surprise us more and show what they may not be expected to show...

Warm thanks to the team of the Yokohama Dance Collection, and to the collaborators of the French Embassy of Japan.

Aymar Crosnier