

Yokohama Dance Collection EX 2012 Competition I Evaluations

Yokohama Dance Collection EX 2012 Competition I attracted 140 entrants from eight countries; I participated in the judging, anticipating with pleasure the fresh talent displayed in every performance.

The rich variety of forms, aesthetics, and expressive techniques on display in this competition impressed me with how much the range of contemporary dance has expanded.

In "Hetero," by Iwabuchi Teita and Seki Kaori, one can almost hear the physical dialogue woven together moment by moment, breath by breath, through the silence.

Suzuki Yuriko's "BORN / 2012" depicts the transformations that occur between two bodies through repeated changes of position, coming together, separating, making contact, retreating, then coming together again.

A creation planned to explore the bodily cosmos, interior and exterior and the darkness of each, plus the technique and compositional power to communicate these insights objectively: all shine in Kaido Chikako's "Schattenlinien / Shadow lines."

The music and selection of props, including chairs and pet bottles, and the taste evident in their placement and the resulting spatial composition are memorable aspects of Ara Yuhei's "Better together." I look forward to his next composition.

The scope of contemporary dance has expanded beyond anything seen before. The individuality that transcends conventional frameworks and the power of what emerges and changes as the dancer and audience interact is breaking new ground.

These young talents, addressing the body with integrity, mark the start of a new age of dance.

Ono Shinji (Producer, Aoyama Theater and Aoyama Round Theater)

Adroit or clumsy, dance that speaks in the choreographer's own vocabulary (but in words that are definitely not a monologue spoken to oneself) delivers what I saw in these performances.

The sophisticated atmosphere of Kaido Chikako's work, the tension in the composition by Iwabuchi Teita and Seki Kaori and the power of the dancers to realize it, Suzuki Yuriko's glittering vision, Ara Yuhei's decisive expressiveness, danced to the full: many moments remain in my heart.

It was only a month after the previous competition that Japan was devastated by the Great East Japan Earthquake.

I was anxious about how it might effect this year's competition, but when the preliminary judging based on videos began, I saw that the work submitted was anything but hazy or unclear. While they varied in scale and maturity, many fascinating works were submitted. As in the previous year, deciding which works should make the cut to participate in the finals was anything but easy.

Among the prizewinners, Kaido Chikako's "Schattenlinien / Shadow lines" was clearly distinguished from the others in the broad sweep of its composition and its accomplished realization, as in, for example, the relationship between art and the movements of the dancer.

In Suzuki Yuriko's "BORN / 2012," the uninhibited movements of the two women have a unique fascination.

"Hetero," by Iwabuchi Teita and Seki Kaori, is filled with such tension that the very air seems to grow denser from the moment the performance begins. The power of the moves of the dancers in that piece, Seki Kaori and Meguro Daiji, was also astonishing. That intensity, maintained without interruption until the very end, made "Hetero" overwhelming even among the other finalists.

The exotic flavor of Ara Yuhei's "Better together," the fresh, vivid sensibility that Yokoyama Ayano, Takahashi Moto, and Tomari Maiko <CRUSH THE TYMKS> demonstrated in "Predawn where star doesn't fall," the lively feeling of Sakai Yukina's "Spica," in which the choreographer also demonstrated her magnetic appeal as a dancer, and the beauty of the carefree physicality in Lee Ji Hee's "Shadow me" were also delightful.

Shindo Hiroko (Dance Critic)



I was privileged to participate in the judging for the second time this year. It was a rare opportunity to experience talents and compositions I had not seen before. I have tried to summarize my impressions of the twelve works that made it to the final judging.

Kaido Chikako's "Schattenlinien / Shadow lines" is a work that, as the title indicates, expresses the light and shadow that appear in spaces straightforwardly, through the body moving in that space. This improvisational approach, in an abstract style, has been attempted many times since the birth of modern dance. Unfortunately, this work, when situated in its historical context, did not, I felt, provide the kind of surprise one expects from new discoveries or new perspectives. The performance did not, however, fully reflect the choreographer's intentions, due to the white dance mat on the floor and the hasty change of dancer just before the performance. I look forward to seeing a performance that more fully reflects the original concept.

"The Rest" by Lee Jae Young is a work for a male-female duo inspired by the motion of a ball, likened to a basketball. (Though wasn't that actually a volleyball?) Unfortunately, the necessary leap from that conception seems not to have occurred. For a dance to work on stage, a climax, some moment or scene that defines the aesthetic or social significance of the work is needed.

The other two works by Korean choreographers, Lee Jig Hee's "Shadow me" and Kim Jung Gi's "Skin," also shared that weakness. The superb skills of the dancers were displayed too innocently, trusting too simply to the potential of dance as a means of expression.

The same observation applies to "Predawn where star doesn't fall," by

Yokoyama Ayano, Takahashi Moto, and Tomari Maiko <CRUSH THE TYMKs>. We cannot overlook the weakness in terms of originality of their choreographic vocabulary – it all seemed to resemble KENTARO!! But what bothered me most of all was the lack of risk taking, the absence of genuine experiments that would push the limits of what is possible or impossible in the act of dancing or of dance as bodily movement. I write this in the hope that they will battle on much further, to the very limit of their abilities, to realize to the full the joy of dancing.

I cannot deny that Ishii Takeo's "Nonsense" is wanting in the same way. In his case, however, I suspected that he has relatively little experience with dance as a work to be presented on stage. His experience has been largely limited to improvisational "dance live" performances in live houses and at other special events.

Dance as a means of expression is, obviously, not confined to the stage or theater. Dance during ceremonies and rituals, with live music, or just dancing alone at home are all dance. What choreographers must strive for, however, is something that transcends dance alone, that engages the "other," the audience, infecting its audience with something so powerful that we who are watching it are frightened or shaken.

This is the effect that Ara Yuhei's "Better together," "BORN / 2012" by Suzuki Yuriko, who received the Jury Prize, and "Hetero," by Iwabuchi Teita and Seki Kaori, recipients of the French Embassy Prize for Young Choreographer, were able to create, with each choreographer and dancer employing individual techniques and skills to create a space-time framework in which dance was fully realized as a stage performance. In Sakai Yukina's "Spica" I also sensed the potential for a satisfying work with greater power and flexibility through a more careful choice of combinations and spaces, plus something extra added by the performance.

Today, every corner of our island nation is teeming with dance.

But dances not seen before--those are rare.

I want to see dance that is more than stale repetition, fresh, new dance, however unpolished.

Maeda Keizo (Board Director, Realcities, an NPO)

“Hetero” by Iwabuchi Teita and Seki Kaori is a duet performance carefully crafted through intense confrontation with their own bodies. The performance was superb; it was unquestionably deserving of its prize.

Suzuki Yurio’s “BORN/2012” depicts, with a pop touch, the disconnect between our bodily motions and emotions. Its game-like feel adds an element of fun.

Many of the works that did not receive prizes were also delightful – the distinctive texture of Ara Yuhei’s movements, for example.

I look forward to new creative expression unconstrained by conventional categories.

Hamano Fumio (Senior Editor, Shinshokan Dance Magazine)

I want to see bodies dancing beyond the boundaries of dance.

There can be no equal to the grace of a body rising to the challenge of a prize, an impetus, a fortunate opportunity.

In my personal view, the notion of “Dance as a never-ending adventure, an experiment” has receded even more than last year, is perhaps even being forgotten.

In this, my second year as a judge, I felt the responsibility of witnessing and commenting on this trend.

Murobushi Ko (Dancer, Choreographer)

This year at Yokohama Dance Collection EX 2012, once again, I had the opportunity to gain a broad view of contemporary dance in Japan and elsewhere in Asia.

In selecting the winners, all the jury members engaged in a frank, constructive and meaningful exchange of opinions.

Iwabuchi Teita and Seki Kaori received the French Embassy Prize for Young Choreographer in Yokohama Dance Collection EX 2012 Competition I. During the six-month residence that is given the prizewinners, they will, I trust, not only expand the range of their experience with dance and the visual arts but also deepen their study of choreography, focusing on the tension created by human bodies on stage, brought to life through the composition of the dance.

Rebecca Lee (Director, L'Institut Franco-Japonais de Yokohama)