

This year, 8 choreographers from 5 countries advanced to the final out of 130 applications, showcasing performances with exceptionally high technical skills and meticulous preparation. Taka Mizuki, who received three prizes, including the Jury Prize, unleashed clear-cut choreography with a contrasting melody to its strength and speed, weaving a minimal world of light and shadow to tell a story of life. Omori Yoko, also a multiple prize recipient, gracefully depicted the complexity of a girl in love with a teddy bear by sampling and remixing various movements from ballet and street dance.

The duo performances by Ji Jie and Park Su Yeol, each in their unique way, brought out the violence of relationships with poignant beauty. Despite not receiving awards, Mohd Zulkarnain Bin Zuber presented fresh movements infused with the hustle and bustle of Kuala Lumpur, while Nagano Yuriko showed enormous potential experimenting with the fusion of dance and Japanese traditional dance.

Next year, Yokohama Dance Collection will celebrate its 30th anniversary. I hope to see exploration and examination beyond the framework of dance and choreography, and an even more liberated approach to the power of music and art in relation to the liberated human body.

Okami Sae (Dance Critic, Associate Professor of Kyoritsu Women's University)

This round featured dance pieces that elevated heart rates with high-speed movements. The dancers, all adept at handling complex motions, presented a flawless performance filled with ideas, providing ample excitement and enjoyment. In Taka Mizuki's "doldrums," I was deeply captivated by her movements which quietly created a time and space that resembled a structured poem. The sharp, liberating movements that seemed to shatter that world of poetry, unexpectedly made the viewer keenly aware of their own body and its mass—a truly breath-taking moment. Omori Yoko's "Instant" unfolding with unique choreography and composition, is an ambitious piece that ventures into a highly advanced realm of dance. I am very much looking forward to what comes next from her. In Park Su Yeol's "dating abuse," the meticulous and dynamic choreography was impressive, but the allure of the strong and robust female dancer Lee Hyun Ji surpassed the work itself. Nagano Yuriko's "Drop" shined as an outlier in this year's lineup, with choreography and composition that far surpassed one's expectations.

I would like to express gratitude once again to all the finalists for providing us judges with a time to simply and literally enjoy dance. However, if I may express a wish, I felt a slight overall sense of loneliness due to the short duration of the pieces and the lack of unexpected ideas. I hope that dancers will continue to pursue their passion persistently, breaking free from the seemingly restrictive framework of dance and exploring their unique artistic visions.

Kitamura Akiko (Choreographer, Dancer, Professor of Shinshu University)

This time around it was a live in-person event, as it should be, post-COVID. Reflecting on the video judging stage, I feel there was a slight lack of perspective or approach, as well as elements of surprise in regards to the creative process. Nevertheless, I was happy to see that eight creators were able to gather safely in Yokohama.

Overall, the performances, whether coincidental or not, were packed densely with elements like skillful contact work for duos, high-speed dancing, and pop-like thinking, much more than I was expecting. From a choreographic perspective, there were few sweet subtleties. There was strength though; the kind of strength that captivates and absorbs attention.

The length of the pieces is a challenging aspect. There was a tendency for the latter half

of the works to maintain a consistent rhythm. However, compared to the approach of Asian countries' works a few years ago, there has been a significant leap in growth. It feels like the variety of 'drawings' — to use an Art metaphor — in the realm of dance in Asia has increased. Their potential is growing. In the midst of this, the austere and precise polished movements of Taka (Mizuki) were pleasant to behold. It feels like she is leaning towards movements in the (Japanese) traditional dance language as opposed to theatricality.

I hope to see these dancers continue exploring the charm of dance that cannot be fully expressed in other fields. As a side note, for everyone who participated, I also hope for the establishment of a 'Dance will continue forever!' kind of dialogue and enjoyment that exists beyond the creative process, which can only happen with long term thinking.

Kondo Ryohei (Founder of <Condors>, Choreographer, Dancer,  
Artistic Director of Saitama Arts Theater)

This time, it was particularly delightful to see a lineup of performances that relied solely on the physical body without the use of video or art. Both video and art are simply tools to be used to extend and deepen the expression of the body, as the dancer's body is the core.

While all the choreographies were meticulously crafted, Taka Mizuki dominated the stage in silence with powerful physicality in her Jury Prize winning performance “doldrums”. Omori Yoko, recipient of the Prize of the French Embassy in Japan - Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels, for young choreographers, is an exceptional dancer whose unique doll-like performance, and ability to lose herself on stage, distorted spacetime. Both of them leave us eager to see what kind of expressions they will showcase next. Park Su Yeol's "dating abuse" stood out with a strong presence by its female dancer, and Ji Jie's "Nowhere to turn" left a thrilling impression, especially in its first half. Nagano Yuriko's "Drop" is an intriguing fusion of contemporary dance and Japanese traditional dance, and I look forward to her future developments.

All three participants from Japan in this competition were winners in Competition II New Choreographer Division. It's heartening to see how they have continued to create, gain experience, and now present noteworthy works.

Hamano Fumio (Senior Editor of Shinshokan Dance Magazine)