

Competition II: General Commentary

As both a judge and an audience member, I enjoyed this experience from the bottom of my heart. Being able to immerse myself in 10 performances at once reminded me of the incredible potential that showcases have of introducing new works and artists. Among them, the piece by Katayama Tessho and his collaborators, which opened the event, was particularly striking. It was a powerful performance that will inspire hope for the future of contemporary dance ten or even twenty years from now.

In a competition, it's inevitable that some get prizes while others don't. However, nothing compares to the significance of encountering new audiences and connecting with peers to grow alongside. At the same time, it made me question: Is it necessary to enter under the name of a single choreographer? A work is never created by one person alone—that's precisely where the challenges and the true joy of the process lie.

Approaches and methods evolve with the times. Embracing that change and adapting flexibly while continuing to walk alongside other artists is what makes Competition II so important. I feel strongly that maintaining this spirit is essential for the future.

Kato Yumina
(Director of Steep Slope Studio)

In my commentary last year, I mentioned, "Rather than feeling compelled to craft a world on stage simply because it's contemporary dance, I hope to see more young artists prioritize dance itself—in other words the body—as the most important element." This year's Competition II featured a significant number of works that met this point with an impressively high level of dance.

More so than debating between first and second place, the major topic during the judging process was the sheer number of choreographers we felt deserved a Best Dancer award in terms of quality, performance, and originality. Works featuring exceptional dancers elevated the entire event, ensuring a thoroughly satisfying experience for the audience. There is no doubt that this year's competition was a resounding success.

Among the works presented, I feel compelled to highlight Katayama Tessho's piece. I'm certain many were captivated by his creation. I have immense respect for <namstrops>, the group that initially guided him toward the path of dance from a young age. In his profile, Katayama writes, "I am experimenting with how we can go beyond <namstrops> dance," and I truly look forward to seeing that exploration unfold.

In many ways, his approach to creating work already feels like it surpasses the foundations laid by <namstrops>, in the best sense of the word. I hope he continues to reflect on why he didn't win the Outstanding New Artist Prize this time and uses that inquiry as fuel to create even more original, groundbreaking work.

Suzuki Takuro

(Head of the dance company CHAiroiPLIN, Dancer, Choreographer, Director)

The ten pieces presented this time showcased remarkable diversity, with no two sharing the same tendencies. It's reassuring to see such richness and variety in the creations of the younger generation.

Fukunaga Shoya's *Contact Shots*, which won the Outstanding New Artist Prize, explores the relationship between video and the body. The disconnection between the still image of the body captured on screen and the body moving on stage creates a curious and intriguing sensation. While the meticulous interplay of video and sound stood out, it was Fukunaga's own body—collapsing again and again with delicate expressiveness—that truly captivated me.

Toyama Haruhiro's *I ∋ Z*, which earned the Encouragement Prize, presented a bizarre and fascinating world that teetered ambiguously between humor and seriousness. Takahashi Akari's elegant performance in *Reincarnation*, a bold challenge to Terry Riley's *In C*, was deserving of the Best Dancer Prize. I hope to see Takahashi tackle the entirety of the piece in the future.

The most striking work this time was *Jump Over The Hurdle, But Do It Diagonally* by 13-year-old Katayama Tessho. Four middle and high school students, who have been exposed to the style of dance company <namstrops> since their early childhood, have fully absorbed the methodology of anti-dance—a technique <namstrops> discovered through repeated daring tightrope walks—and brought it to life on stage as if it were second nature. Truly, this is native contemporary dance.

This piece was an excellent variation on motifs from the company's past works, but I eagerly await the day in the not-too-distant future when they return to Competition II with a fully original creation.

Hamano Fumio

(Senior Editor of Shinshokan Dance Magazine)

The ten finalists each had their own unique approach to their works, reminding me once again that choreography is not solely about the movement of the body. It's about what kind of person the dancer is, who they dance with, and how they engage with time, space, and sound. Choreography is an act of building relationships between the body and all the elements that exist in the given space.

Fukunaga Shoya's *Contact Shots* felt particularly fresh. By incorporating stage devices like cameras and monitors, along with a powerful sound design that dominated the entire space, the work created a sense in my body of expanding, contracting, and floating multi-dimensionally within the ten-minute timeframe. It's a difficult sensation to put into words, and I don't feel this explanation fully captures it, but there was an undeniable sense of positive mystery in the piece.

Toyama Haruhiro's *I \ni 2* offered a wildly unpredictable narrative that made use of his unique personality and the sheer impact of his jumps, resulting in many moments of genuine laughter. Takahashi Akari's *Reincarnation* impressed me with its bold simplicity in "choreographing the spine" for Terry Riley's piece *In C* to express the primal themes of life.

Although not awarded, there's no doubt that the work by Katayama Tessho and his collaborators left a deep emotional impression. Similarly, Odo Tomoko's portrayal of a person gradually unraveling while singing enka was captivating in its own right.

I sincerely hope that the seeds of the works born here endure through the trials of rain and wind, eventually sprouting under the light of another day. I eagerly await news of their future endeavors.

Yoshigai Nao
(Filmmaker, Dancer)