



## Profile

### Satoshi MIYAGI

Born in 1959 in Tokyo, Satoshi Miyagi is a theater director. He studied dramatic theory under Yushi Odashima, Moriaki Watanabe and Hachiro Hitaka in University of Tokyo. In 1990 he established the theater company Ku Na'uka. The company performed internationally. Miyagi won domestic and international acclaim for his interpretations of contemporary plays and his directing style that incorporated traditional Asian theater acting techniques and conventions. In April 2007, he was appointed general artistic director of Shizuoka Performing Arts Center (SPAC). In addition to staging his own plays, he has continued to invite select works from around the world that deal with contemporary issues and themes, while at the same time launching new programs for children and young people of Shizuoka as part of his overall attempt to make the theater a "Window to the World." His representative works are *Medea*, *Mahabharata*, *Peer Gynt*, and more. Miyagi is winner of the 2004 3rd Asahi Performing Arts Award, and the 2005 2nd Asahi Beer Art Award.

Shizuoka Performing Arts Center (SPAC)  
<http://www.spac.or.jp/>

# Artist Interview

アーティスト・インタビュー

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## Theater as a Window to the World Satoshi Miyagi leads the reborn SPAC

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Japan has two representative arts centers with facilities where artists from Japan and abroad can engage in arts creation in residence for extended periods. They are the Toga Art Park of Toyama Prefecture with its more than 30-year history and the Shizuoka Performing Arts Center (SPAC), now in its 15th year. Both facilities were established and developed under the leadership of Tadashi Suzuki, known for the "Suzuki Method" of violin teaching, working in cooperation with the local governments of Toga-mura (present Nanto City) in Toyama Prefecture and Shizuoka Prefecture. Both have a creative environment complete with rehearsal studios and residence facilities and both have performance facilities in indoor and outdoor theater spaces. Also, both are known for their international performing arts festivals. In particular, SPAC is known as Japan's first public arts organization to be complete with not only theater facilities and their related hardware but also a full artistic staff of actors, stage technicians and creative staff. In 2007, Satoshi Miyagi took over the job of SPAC general artistic director from predecessor Tadashi Suzuki. In this interview Miyagi speaks about running this public theater and the creative activities of its creative staff. With the Ku Na'uka Theatre Company he formerly led, Miyagi was its playwright and developed a style in which each character is played by two actors by dividing the character's movement and speech between a "mover" and a "speaker" as in Bunraku puppet theater. This style won him acclaim both at home and abroad. Now Miyagi is in his sixth year as SPAC's second artistic director. In this interview we spoke with Miyagi about the path he pursues, the unique projects he has launched and his vision for creative activities managing a public theater and a group of creators.

Interviewer: Hiroko Yamaguchi (Asahi Shinbun)

In Japan, the Shizuoka Performing Arts Center (SPAC) is unprecedented for its scale and contents. Could we begin by having you tell us about its set-up and how it is organized?

Shizuoka Performing Arts Center is a public interest foundation that not only manages theater facilities and rehearsal studios but is also Japan's first public arts organization to have a full artistic staff of actors, stage technicians and production staff.

The center's facilities include the horseshoe shaped Shizuoka Arts Theatre (up to 401 seats) designed by architect Arata Isozaki and located adjacent to the Higashi

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Shizuoka Station, and in the Shizuoka Performing Arts Park in the foothills of Nihondaira there is The Open Air Theater UDO (approx. capacity 400), the indoor theater DAENDO (oval hall) (approx. capacity 400), rehearsal studios and residence facilities. There, SPAC's actors, technical staff, directors and production staff are involved in creative activities on a daily basis.

These are all public facilities of Shizuoka Prefecture and the conditions of their use and maintenance are all set down in detail in their public ordinance. And, with regard to the existence of the creative group (called the Arts Bureau), the fact that the facilities are specially designated for their use is also clearly stated in the public ordinance. In the case of Japan, there are very few organizations that have the "hardware" of a theater and related facilities and also a creative group. In fact, there are almost none. I believe that SPAC is a very revolutionary case born of the negotiations conducted by its original general artistic director Tadashi Suzuki with the Shizuoka prefectural government to realize Suzuki's vision of what the ideal public theater in Japan should be like.

Besides the group's actors and directors, SPAC's creative group also has lighting, stage art, sound and costume artists, albeit most are still young. Of course, all of them live here in Shizuoka Prefecture. In Europe, this kind of public theater [with creators] is the standard, so you could say that SPAC is the only public theater in Japan that is close to the world standard.

**What kind of a contract do the actors and the other creative staff members work under?**

Under the previous artistic director they had three-year contracts with the general artistic director as self-employed workers. It was like the contract a professional baseball player has. When I took over as general artistic director I decided to do away with the 3-year specification for the contracts and decided the term in talks with each of them as self-employed workers. If there were some who wanted a one-year contract initially to see if they wanted to continue after that, I accepted the one-year contract term. For the actors, I made the terms even more flexible and accept terms like working six months of the year in two 3-month segments with open months in between. Presently there are about 90 people employed in SPAC's Arts Bureau, including those that don't have full-year contracts.

By the way, the general artistic director's position is also under a 3-year contract, with the foundation's board of directors responsible for choosing the person and the contract being one with the foundation. Mine is a part-time employment contract. Under the previous general artistic director, the general artistic director had authority over personnel and executive power over the budget, but since then the system has been changed. As general artistic director I don't have those powers, but since I was also appointed the position of vice-president of the foundation when I was given the job of general artistic director, I have executive power over personnel and the budget as vice-president of the foundation. From next year SPAC will become a public interest incorporated foundation and I think the contract system will change because of that, but I should still have executive power over personnel and the budget.

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I don't believe there is any other general artistic director of a public theater in Japan that has that much executive power. How did the transfer of responsibilities to you from the former general artistic director occur?

To be honest, when Tadashi Suzuki approached me with the offer of this job, I was quite surprised. I never expected him to quit the position. Actually, before SPAC was started, I was involved in the running of Toga Art Park as a member of the young directors group "P4," and at that time I had the opportunity to hear Mr. Suzuki speak about his plans and his dream and felt that I shared much of the same vision in my own way. Then, when I took over the job, I was able to think about what Mr. Suzuki had accomplished in his year with SPAC and what he may have left undone.

I believe that by creating world-class works here at SPAC, Mr. Suzuki was concentrating on using the quality of those works over a 10-year period to catapult the SPAC name into a position of international recognition. So, I think the first thing I have to do is to maintain that SPAC identity by continuing to produce world-class works. At the same time, when I came onboard and SPAC entered its second decade, I thought we should initiate activities as a theater that will build a broader foundation of supporters here in Shizuoka Prefecture, or the community, if that isn't too simple a way to express it.

However, when I first most of the SPAC members were people who had contracts from the term of the first artistic director, and as the new general artistic director I didn't know at all if I should be trying to do things that had never been done here before. I wondered what would happen when the director that leads the creative group is suddenly changed to a person with a different aesthetic orientation who must take over in an existing theater company.

But, when I thought about it I realized that it is not rare at all for the leader of an orchestra or a corporation to be changed with the core members remaining the same. Nonetheless, not only myself but also the actors and even the production staff have made efforts to find ways to make things work. In the early days of my term, I thought that if there was any trait I had that made me suited for the job of leading SPAC, it was that I could be patient (laughs).

Were there that many inconveniences when you first took over?

A director's concern is how he or she can realize their vision, how they can give form to their works, and they work hard to put together an organization that makes this work possible. My company Ku Na'uka was that kind of organization for me that I spent 17 or 18 years putting together, gathering people from here and there, taking actors and creative staff that had formerly been headed in completely different directions and guiding them as a group until we could create the kind of theater I wanted to see, with efficiency and purity.

Since coming to SPAC meant I was now general artistic director of an organization that had none of that shared sense of direction, I believe it was natural that my intentions and language didn't communicate smoothly at times. But, I also believe that a director must have the ability to build an organization that has that type of shared consciousness. So, I was intent on proving that a director had that ability and on expanding the scope of places where I could be active as a director.

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We often hear that when working at a public theater the artists often have trouble communicating through the same language with the government officials in charge. Is that a problem you have found?

I have never thought of that as a problem. That is because for a long period when performing in overseas festivals I watched how the directors who served as the festival directors handled their job. In cases like press conferences where journalists would ask them detailed questions about the budget allocations, as if it were a shareholders meeting, the directors always answered thoroughly and convincingly. Then those journalists would write newspaper articles praising the directors for how proficiently were handling their job. That is when I came to understand that the job of a director was not simply one of creating works that would win artistic praise.

Has there been a big turnover in the SPAC members since you took over?

It appears that some time after I came in the actors came to see what kind of theater they really wanted to pursue. There were some who decided that they wanted to work in the same direction as the new general artistic director who shared some of the basics of the Suzuki Method but still had a different worldview, but there were also some who realized that the Suzuki worldview was the one that they really wanted to pursue. Eventually, at the end of about two years there were some who transferred to SCOT and some who chose to stay at SPAC. It wasn't a complete turnover of the staff, but regardless of the questions of artistic direction, there were some who quit after working at SPAC for about three years, and in that way the turnover is ongoing.

You spoke earlier about your desire to work at "building a broader foundation of supporters." What sort of programs have you initiated toward that goal? Could you tell us about that and also about your theater management policies?

The program we started in my first year at SPAC was the "Theater School" for children from the 6th year of elementary school to the second year of high school (11th grade) that has them create a play during their summer vacation. This program has continued and this summer its sixth year. Now the assurance that this project wasn't a mistake has been a big experience for me.

The original plan was to hold an audition and choose 40 young people from among the applicants, but about twice that number showed up and I ended up not being able to reject almost any of them. In front of all the children, I talked about doing a play while using a relay race as a comparison. I said that for a relay race it is best to make a relay team from four people who are fast runners, but if you are going to make a play about relay racing, it will be more interesting if you have a variety of people, some who are fast, some who are slow and perhaps a person who is injured and can't run. Having said that, I couldn't reject any of the applicant's without making a lie out of what I had just said. So, we ended up making two casts to make two different plays, one for a day performance and one for night.

We made the rehearsals open to the children's parents, and that resulted in something interesting. At first they only came to see their own children, but seeing how in a group dance there would be some children who danced well and others that were always just off tempo, the parents gradually came to find that find of diversity among

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the children interesting. Of course, in part it was that kind play we were doing, but even people who had no special interest in theater previously came to sense naturally how interesting that diversity was. It gave me the feeling that the program was proving the universal appeal of diversity in not only theater but in all arts and that I had gained encouraging support for my work here at SPAC as something meaningful.

If the early modern theater was a place where people gathered reconfirm that they all shared the same values and gain assurance in that knowledge, the late modern theater is a place where a truly diverse cross-section of people gather. Because, people who don't know each other's origins come together to build the cities. A theater is like a microcosm of that, and I see it as a place where a diverse collection of people bringing a variety of worldviews come together and put them on one plate, so we can create things that show some of the truly laughable situations, and in and that way the theater becomes a place where people can learn how to enjoy life in contemporary society. That was a theory I had been nurturing inside me for some time and our Theater School proved to me that I can say it now with assurance.

**At SPAC you have a children's dance company named SPAC-ENFANTS. Is this a dance version of your Theater School?**

It is related in some ways but it is a different program. The main purpose of the Theater School is not the value of the play itself but getting the participants to know the functions of the stage by having them actually participate in a play on stage. That is not to say that the level of quality we ask from each director is set lower, but it is true that within the framework of this program we are not striving to create works that can compete on the world level. However, it wouldn't be surprising if some of the young people who participated in this might want to make a career for themselves in the arts. I thought it was unfortunate that SPAC didn't have a career course to offer those young people should they make that decision. With only the Theater School to offer, the young people who will want to become artists will eventually have to go to Tokyo, in a process that has been repeated over and over in the past and leads to all the unique human resources leaving here and gathering in Tokyo. Our SPAC-ENFANTS program evolved from the idea that, if that were the case, we would like to work here at our theater with the young people who want to go straight to the international level, in terms of the work they create as well.

The model came from soccer. As many people know, Shizuoka Prefecture has a very strong soccer tradition and many young players have gone from here in Shizuoka directly to places like Germany and England, without going to Tokyo first. They play there and then eventually return. So, we thought, if we were going to have the same thing happen in the arts, what area could we do it in? With theater there is the problem of the language barrier, but with an art like contemporary dance that relied mainly on physical expression, the possibility of breaking through to the world level would be better, we thought.

This would also be a program that could be run on a limited budget, and it would be something that other public theaters could also do if they wanted to. As I am saying this, I recall that the other new aim I had in mind for SPAC after I took over, besides spreading its foundation of support, was to set examples of programs that other pub-

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lic theaters could imitate. I believed that when Mr. Suzuki was leading SPAC, people saw it as an exceptional theater that nobody could imitate. But, after I took over, no one would hesitate to say, "If Miyagi can do it, other people can probably do it too," and I wanted them to imitate what we did. And in order to make our programs easy to copy, I believe we have to make the way we plan and implement our programs visible to people on the outside and make our operations more transparent.

**After beginning by strengthening the relationship between children and the theater, what kind of a place do you want to make your theater?**

When I think about what kind of place I want the theater to be, I remember the good theaters that I have seen overseas. They were theaters where people naturally gathered even when there were no performances and even if the theater wasn't located in the middle of the city, and they were theaters where all of the people working there truly love theater. That latter trait was something that SPAC already had before I got there, but to make the theater a place where people gather naturally, I believe that the relationship with children will be very important eventually. By no coincidence, when children come to the theater, invariably their parents will come too. (Laughs)

To get as many young people as possible to become involved at SPAC, we have also put significant efforts into our program to invite middle and high school students to view performances at our Shizuoka Arts Theatre. While Mr. Suzuki led SPAC there was already a Shizuoka Prefecture program to bring middle school students to see from five to ten stages a year. But when we calculated what percentage of the prefecture's middle school students that reached, it was only about one in seven. This is not sufficient for a public theater and also not well balanced from the standpoint of equal opportunity. So, I wanted to make it possible for every student attending school in Shizuoka Prefecture with its prefectural theater to be able to come to a SPAC theater and see a SPAC production at least once during their school years.

When we surveyed again how many middle and high school students there were in Shizuoka Prefecture, we found that there were just over 30,000 in each grade. So, we made 30,000 our target for invited student viewers a year. That rate would make the odds nearly 100% that all the prefecture's students would come to a SPAC performance at least once during their six years in middle and high school. However, since the Shizuoka Arts Theatre has up to 401 seats, and when you subtract the number of teachers that would be accompanying them, we would have to have about 100 performances for students a year to reach the 30,000 objectives. This year, with plans for about 15,000 students to attend about 60 performances, we are exactly half way to that goal. When those children go home from the performances and tell their families that they went to the theater that day, that may be where the conversation ends. But, 20 years from now we may reach a point where the father will be able to carry on the conversation, saying, "When I went to SPAC I saw back in high school we saw *Romeo and Juliet*." If the program continues that long, I think we will have a new situation where parents and their children can talk about theater together.

It may sound like we have a long way to go yet, but I consider bringing 15,000 middle and high school students to the theater a year to be no small achievement. At the end of these performances the person in charge of the production comes out as a speak-

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er and tells the students that in the future, if they feel like they would like to work I theater to keep in mind that Shizuoka has SPAC, and doing this makes them aware that theater exists as a possible career course, which I believe adds another window when they think about their education and career possibilities.

As I said earlier, the Theater is a platform that can receive human diversity. In theater you will find “solitary souls” who have trouble adjusting to their surroundings, who have difficulty reading situations and others’ intentions, and it is not just as characters in the plays but in the actual people working in the theater. I want to communicate to as many young people as possible that, even though they may be different from the adults they may see around them every day, there are men and women here at the theater who have chosen to live this way.

SPAC has had two theater festivals a year, one in the spring and another in autumn, and of these, you changed the “Shizuoka Spring Festival” to the “World Theater Festival Shizuoka under Mt. Fuji” two years ago and set a new direction for it. Since then you have programmed the festival with more artists of your own generation, and it seems to have become a festival with a stronger Satoshi Miyagi flavor.

Under Mr. Suzuki, I had the impression that some of the most famous directors in the world, like Yuri Lyubimov, Ariane Mnouchkine and Peter Brook came to the festival to direct because they were personal friends of Suzuki. But, European directors of my generation were feeling that it is about time for their generation of artists to come to the forefront, and I also felt that it was time for the their generation to take a more prominent role. I had build relationships with these artists of the next generation while Ku Na’uka was performing overseas, so I started to invite them to our spring festival in increasing numbers. But, by my fifth year here in 2011, my artist friends like Olivier Py were now active on the cutting edge in Europe’s big festivals, so I though the time was right for this new generation to become the main focus of our festival. That is what led me to change the festival’s name.

With the new World Theater Festival Shizuoka under Mt. Fuji, I wanted to do things to connect Shizuoka to the world through theater. Although it may sound rather simple to say this, I wanted people to see that there are people in all parts of the world making theater in all types of different environments. That’s because, from my experiences participating in many theater festivals in the so-called Third World countries, I knew personally that there were theater people active in every imaginable place in the world. And, by having people come to our festival and come in contact with a diverse variety of people and works, I wanted people to see that the world isn’t a set and finished quantity and there is still plenty of room for change. I wanted to communicate that theater is a window to the world.

I wanted to show that, though at first glance the world may appear to be a solid monolith, the arts can put a crack in that stone and open up new possibilities. But then, when the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami and the ensuing nuclear power plant accident put another undeniable crack in our world, I began to think that Theater also has value as a place that will always be there no matter what happens. This is also something that I felt to some degree with the SPAC-ENFANTS program and with the play *Tenkosei* (transferred student) that Norimizu Ameya created for us using high

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schools student actors. Seeing the student actors moved to tears as they parted ways after the performance, I couldn't help but think that several years from now they will probably forgotten the play and theater. But, at the same time I feel that it is important that SPAC will continue to exist here. The theater can provide us with timely opportunities to think about the important things like life and death that are inherently part of life and things that human beings should normally be confronting. In the past, theater performed a role something like a temple or church, and that is why a theater was always and should always continue to be a part of the community. This was something that the earthquake and tsunami made me conscious of again.

Leaving the subject of SPAC for a while, I would like to ask you about your own activities as a theater artist until now. Did you first become seriously involved in theater when you were a student at University of Tokyo?

I was at university for a long time, but at the time I wasn't thinking about working in theater. You could say it was like a research lab for me, a place where I could use theater to work on the recovering from the areas where I felt painfully alienated, namely the physicality of the body and relations with others.

It is something I often talk about, when I say that there are basically three elements to theater: language (words), the body (physicality) and the group (working with others). Of these, the one area where I felt rather capable was language, but that involved little more than saying that I had gotten good grade in [Japanese] language at school (laughs). But, I was very incapable when it came to the body and the group. I wanted to do something to improve myself in relation those two areas and come to peace with them, and I founded the theater group Meifu in college as my attempt to continue "researching" them, if you will.

At University of Tokyo at the time there was Hideki Noda's theater company Yume no Yumin-sha. We hear that when you were a student at the middle school affiliated with Tokyo University of Education (present University of Tsukuba) you saw and were influenced by the works of Hideki Noda, who was a student at the university's affiliated high school.

I don't know if I would say I was influenced by it, because when I was in the drama club in high school, I was not interested in writing stories, and our plays were written by other people, not me. Also, I wasn't really interested in directing either. As I said earlier, theater was a place for me to find peace with the body and the group and that is all I was really focusing on, so I was always watching people's plays and actors' performances [as a spectator]. As I was doing that, I began to notice what was going on in all aspects of plays and performance in considerable detail, and I believe that is what eventually led me toward directing. Also, the fact that I was performing on stage as an actor wasn't really because I was interested in acting as such, but more that I was doing it because people told me what I did was interesting. Rather than acting in itself, what interested me was taking the dish I had prepared and going out on stage, serving it up and then coming back. That was the feeling I was doing it with.

But, as I reached my late twenties and began to think about what should be focusing on as the center of my life, an acquaintance who had begun working as an event pro-

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ducer saw our plays and said it was interesting, and that if I did a solo play by myself he would produce it. That is how I began doing solo plays from 1986 as the “Miyagi Satoshi Show.” As director, I knew very well the type of things I could do successfully as an experienced actor, so I was able to create plays of reasonably good quality in very little time, and since I was writing it and performing it all by myself, I was able to make enough money a it to feed myself. However, as I said earlier, it was the problem of working in a group that I had to find my solution for and since I had come to believe strongly that theater was for doing things that one couldn’t do alone, I eventually formed my company Ku Na’uka in 1990.

Ku Na’uka is known for the “two actors, one role” style like in Bunraku puppet theater, with the spoken lines and the movement of a character divided between two actors, one serving as the “speaker” and the other as the “mover.” What kind of experimentation did you go through before arriving at that method?

The “two actors, one role” style was something that I used from the very start with Ku Na’uka. It is a style that was born from questions I felt while I was doing my solo play performances. When I worked on preparing my performance for a solo play, I would think about the verbal presentation and the physical movement completely separately. The lines can be spoken using one half of the brain. Meanwhile, I would think separately about the physical movement and expressions I would accompany the lines with, thinking things like, “I’ll do [the lines and movement] simultaneously in this part, and at times I will inject a slight pause and not synchronize them.” It is like the right wheel and the left wheels are turning separately but they move along together. But, even though I was thinking about and performing the two parts separately, the audience is looking at me as if I am some rarely blessed being from whom the words and the body movement flow in perfect unison. When in truth, my performance was an attempt to somehow bring together the words and movement I had torn apart once and match them up again within myself. This made me feel quite uncomfortable, as if I might be deceiving the audience.

So, I decided that if I was going to start another theater group, I wanted to create works that showed a separation of words and body movement in a clear form. That became my “two actors, one role” method. This also became the reason that later, I came to think of the job of the director as one of helping the actors search for the relationship between the words and the body movement in their acting.

It took a good bit of searching and experimenting before I found plays that provided material for what I wanted to express with the “two actors, one role” method. What I found was that, rather than the plays of Shakespeare, the “father of modern theater,” or later masters like Chekhov, it is the so-called classical tragedies, like *Medea* with protagonists possessed by clearly recognizable passions such as love or hate and aware of their state, as are the other characters. Seeing glimpses of the divide or the lapses between word and movement through these works shows how much the two long for each other. From the moment human beings acquired language, they became separated from the world in one sense. Using theater to search for ways to repair and come to peace with that schism has been a theme in my creative work from the beginning and remains so today as well.

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One of the unique features of your Ku Na'uka performances is your use of percussion, isn't it?

In the early days of Ku Na'uka, the method was that we began by putting together a number of pieces of music into something like a suite and then I would fit the lines of the script to the music, after which we would put the movement to that. However, even though the music was the initial element, I didn't feel that the actors' movement was not synchronized with it. When I wondered why and watch to try to find the reason, I realized it was because the actors were not in tune with each other's bodies and movement. For example, in the butoh performances of Sankai Juku, all of the dancers are doing different movements but they are always appear to be in sync, because they are aware of each other's bodies (physical presence) and movement.

So, I began using percussion as a form of training to help build the actors' awareness of each other's bodily movement. At first, when I'd have them beat out the same phrase, it didn't sound in sync, even though they were in time with the metronome. But, when they become aware of what the other person wants and when you can feel that desire, they can really enjoy beating the drum and it sounds good to the listener too. When I saw this I thought it was good enough to include our performances, so we gradually began to include live percussion performance in our stages. Being able to play percussion means you are able to deliver lines and move the same as the actors. I tell them that the percussion is part of the script, it is like a conversational exchange with your fellow performers.

At SPAC you have presented works like *Yashagaike* staged in the same [two actors, one role] style as former Ku Na'uka productions as well as works performed in what we could call normal style with one actor doing both the verbal and movement parts.

For a single artist or a single theater company to compete in the world, they have to perfect their own unique methods. However, when I think about what types of works should be presented at SPAC as Shizuoka's only theater specializing in theater arts, it isn't enough to pursue only one style. Thinking in terms of cuisine, specialized restaurants will often develop one taste, be it buckwheat noodles (*soba*) or curry, that no other restaurant can imitate, but SPAC is more like the big restaurant of a department store that has to have a menu with all the main standards to fit the preferences of a wider range of people. No matter how delicious it might be, people won't keep coming regularly to a restaurant that only serves one curry dish (laughs). Since there is a need for us to present a program that will give the audience encounters with a sort of textbook selection the famous works and styles of theater if they come to SPAC regularly over a period of two or three years, we have to pursue a wide range of style in our work.

Regarding the "two actors, one role" method, at SPAC we have undertaken an experiment to spread the meaning of this method. This is the aim of our recent "Grimm Fairytales" series, and while it may appear at first glance to be done in a normal "one actor, one role" style with the speaking and moving performed together by one actor, in fact what we have done is to work up the play once in the two actors, one role style with a separate speaker and mover and then have the results of that acted out by one actor. I ask the actors to imagine themselves as a receptacle that the voice and words enter and show us what effect that has on their body and what schisms occur.

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Lately you have put into practice a new theory of theater based on the key phrases of “restoration of poetry” and “weak theater.” From your experience with Ku Na’uka and five years [at SPAC] in Shizuoka, what visions do you have for new possibilities in theater.

In my Ku Na’uka period I thought that in order to compete on the world stage and continue to exist as an independent company we had to have quality that the world would recognize. That was the only objective standard that would make people think, “This theater company is essential for Japan.” So, I thought about how to create plays that would be recognized internationally, and as a result of that search, I decided to strive to create something like haiku poetry, bonsai, the rock garden of Ryoanji temple and the paintings of Sesshu. In other words, like all of these creations, I would reduce the number of compositional elements and, instead, make each of the elements extremely powerful. You could also express it as narrowing down the battle-field, setting limitations and, in turn, deepen the depth of it. At the time, I accepted the word “strength” as it was being used in the world, and I judged the quality of a work in terms of its strength. And in fact, Ku Na’uka received a fair degree of recognition based on that way of thinking.

However, that way of thinking was based on a Western yardstick (measure of importance) that hadn’t changed since the days of Alexander the Great. It is a standard that we swallowed unconditionally when we imported Western culture. With the company Ku Na’uka I was unable to break out of the spell of that “strength,” unable to break out of that cage of strength, but by moving on to the larger playing board of SPAC, I feel that I have come to a place where I can attempt new challenges that are free of that spell of strength. The phrases that I use to describe this new challenge are “weak theater” and “restoration of poetry.”

In specific terms, it is an attempt to overthrow what is considered “strong artistic expression” by the standard of “strength”—namely that, in the case of the actor, excellence in stage performance is considered to be the ability of the actor to control his or her body skillfully and at will and deliver powerful lines with powerful acting. And, the concept that came to me in my search for a way to affect this change is “poetry.”

It says in the Bible that Noah heard a voice telling him to “Build a boat (arc).” It was not an idea that he arrived at by thinking but something that suddenly came to his mind. The words “Build a boat” came to him not in the form of the written word but with a sound, and when it came he probably said the words aloud. No one would know the meaning of the strength of those words until he spoke them. That is a process that is completely different from the way we, as actors, deliver our lines from the script in a play. That is because a script is written so that there is already certainty about how much meaning and strength the words have when they are spoken. Even if the actor has the technique to deliberately hide the intention, in his or her mind there is a clear intent regarding the effect the words will have when they speak them.

The words “Build a boat” that Noah uttered with no such consciousness or intent nevertheless had the power to change Noah thoroughly, in body and soul, from the next day. Inherently, words have that function and power, and when words do have that function, I call it “poetry.” If there had been five people near Noah at that time and if they had spoken the words that came to their minds in the same way, they surely

## Artist Interview

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would have been changed in the same way, and what I am thinking about now is the possibility of having the same thing happen between our actors and the audience.

Having the actors and the audience struck in the same way by words (poetry) that seem to have come down from heaven, and to have the dramatic experience of feeling oneself changed in a passive way by those words. This would be the “Weak Theater” that I seek, which would escape from the yardstick of “strength” wielded by Western culture and from the framework in which the actor controls his or her body. Completely opposite to the strongly controlled [actor’s] body, Weak Theater would be a place for a more fragile body susceptible to the power of the words that come down on it, and a place where words (poetry) would be freed from the desires of actor and revered.

I must add, however, that this method is still little more than an empty desktop theory, and if likened to the task of climbing a mountain, experiments to put it into practice have only progressed about two-tenths of the way to the summit. I guess that is still quite theoretical, isn’t it? (Laughs) In actual practice, I am having the actors train by going on stage with no script memorized and then using a projector to show the lines and have the actors speak them for the first time as they appear in succession.

At SPAC, you direct some of the plays, but you also bring in other directors, like Norimizu Ameya, Kuro Tanino, Seiji Nozoe and others, and give them the means and facilities to create productions on a scale that they couldn’t undertake with their own companies. I believe this gives those directors an opportunity to open up new horizons, and in the same way, are you making an effort to nurture playwrights as well?

From my viewpoint, I believe that playwrights have more opportunities to work creatively in the world than directors. Even if their works aren’t staged, the plays they have written can be read anywhere in the country, and if the playwright has the capability, they can create first-class works anywhere in the world.

On the other hand, for directors who gather their fellow college theater mates, form a theater company and are active with that company for ten years, what waits beyond that? Unless they happen to meet a larger place, a theater, that they can organize [and expand the scale of their work], there are many I have seen who eventually lose their direction and become bewildered. That is why I want us, as ones who have a theater, to give directors the opportunity to test their capabilities to the fullest. And, I believe that the job of the director is not just creating productions. I want people to see that being able to organize a place like this is also part of their job and their capability.

No matter how many good playwrights write how many good plays and no matter how many outstanding actors may be trained, if their aren’t directors who can successfully bring the works to the stage, many plays would lie untouched and never be performed. If directors are able to do their work they can help many of the lonely and helpless creators finally have their name recorded in the ongoing history of the theater performances. I believe that “saving” these lost creators in that way is also surely the role of the directors. For that reason, I want to continue to support directors through our various programs at SPAC.