



Hiroko Tanakawa

Artist Interview アーティスト・インタビュー

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Stage musician/sound artist Hiroko Tanakawa Interpreting Satoshi Miyagi's theatrical world

宮城聡の劇世界を支える
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For over 20 years, Hiroko Tanakawa has created the stage music/sound for productions directed by Satoshi Miyagi (artistic director, Shizuoka Prefectural Arts Center (SPAC)), who is known for stage directing that divides roles into movers and speakers. Using the performing actors in their rotations on stage and a rich variety of percussion instruments, Tanakawa has created a unique style of stage sound for plays like *The Adventures of King Mahabharata* and *Antigone*. For Miyagi's 2017 New Kabuki production *The War Chronicles of Mahabharata* (Starring: Kikugoro Onoe and others), Tanakawa drew attention working in collaboration with Kabuki musicians. She also works energetically in workshops for people from the general public and children and in her own creative activities, such as working with director Koji Kurasako and the activities of the NPO "Children Meet Artists" and more, constantly searching for new and organic ways to bring art into daily life. In this interview we explore the work of Tanakawa, who, with no formal music education, sees herself as a creative outsider in the world of stage sound and music.

Interviewer: Masahiko Yokobori

The encounter with music

May we begin by asking about your initial encounter with music?

When I was about 20, I had a part-time job working at the studio reception desk at the PARCO Theater, and at the time there was a yearly "Stage Laboratory" seminar, and I happened to attend the musician Makoto Yano's (*1) music seminar, and that became my first real encounter with music. This encounter with Yano-san's music brought me a new perspective in the way I looked at the drama club activities I had continued all through high school and junior college, and with my interest in dance and Butoh, I began for a while to do movement as a performer in the stage productions of Yuzo Ishiyama's group Nest.

What was done in Yano-san's workshops?

Every day there was work done in all aspects of music, from writing lyrics, song music and performing. In that context, I wasn't able to do anything at first. All of the participants besides me had experience playing some instrument and reading and writing music, and seeing that I wasn't able to do any of that, Yano-san said to me,

*1 Makoto Yano

Born 1947, Composer, music arranger, music producer and pianist. In the 1970s he began his career as the organist for the band Original Moon Riders and was active with representative Japanese musicians like Keiichi Suzuki, Haruomi Hosono, Takashi Matsumoto and Kyohei Tsutsumi and was a leader of the new music scene in Japan as an arranger. He has worked as an arranger and producer with over 100 musicians and produced many hit songs.

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“I want some rhythm, would you beat the drum?” So all I did was to keep the tempo of the music playing percussion instruments. Like that, I was able to experience the process of making music by adding words and melody to make phrases and then add rhythm bit by bit to make a musical piece. Since it was my job to keep the tempo, I was able to watch the whole process from a position that was one step removed from the others. Looking back now, I believe that gave me the perspective I needed to do the creative work I am doing today. I am often asked how I make music. Like back then, I still can't write a musical score and I can't read one either. I still work in the same style that I did in Yano-san's workshops, putting together phrases that I come up with to make pieces.

Didn't you have any experience with music such as learning piano as a child?

None at all. After that encounter with Yano-san I began to do percussion. After I started doing drama in high school, I was always going to see plays, but after my encounter with music I started to have new interest in the elements themselves that make up a play, like the spoken lines and the movement, and for a while my interest became focused on Butoh and contemporary dance.

Meeting Satoshi Miyagi

Would you tell us about your encounter with Miyagi-san?

From 1986, Miyagi-san was doing one-man plays called the “Satoshi Miyagi Show,” and I went to see one as a member of the audience. I thought he was strange, but it was interesting. In 1990, I even auditioned for the production of *Hamlet* he was directing. I didn't get selected, though (laughs). After that, Miyagi-san came to the Yano Style Music Meeting that I was attending to the staging for a recital, and later when I went to a Pina Bausch performance, he was there too, and he said, “We seem to meet often.” After a few more such chance meetings, Miyagi-san said at one of them that he was going to do a production of *Turandot* and wanted to include sound in it, and he invited me to come and try taking part. I guess that was how we started working together.

For that production, Miyagi-san did the music/sound himself, didn't he?

Yes. But it wasn't much more than having each of the actors do one or two sound effects. Until around the time of that *Turandot* production, I believe that Miyagi-san didn't have much use for music. To the actors who didn't have a part in a particular scene, including myself, he would say, “Here I want you to repeat this beat,” and there would be different sounds and beats that he wanted at different places, like *pon-pon* here and *sha-sha*- there.

Miyagi-san thought that music with a melody imposed a specific image on a scene, so he didn't use instruments used for playing melodies, and in terms of scales, he would only use no more than a two-note scale. For example, if you have a three-note scale and sound *do – mi – so*, it would become sound defining a bright and optimistic scene. But, if it is only two-note repetitions of *do – so* it will not define the scene as

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either bright or dark in mood, so it can be interpreted either way. Rhythm alone will not impose a mood on a scene, so he wanted to use only percussive rhythms, it seemed. At the time, he was using about 20 actors, and besides Mikari-san, who was on stage most of the time, the others would be rotated regularly as sound makers.

What kinds of instruments did you all use?

At first, we would buy five or six of the kind of simple instruments sold at Asian souvenir shops, Then the type began to increase to the use of log drums, African djembe drums, conga drums and steel pans, and with them the music/sound-making work increased as well. As that happened, I began to feel that doing both acting and the sound would lead to poorer quality for both, so I asked if I could just concentrate on the sound performance for a while, and Miyagi-san gave me permission to do so on the condition that I would eventually return to acting parts as well, but in the end I never did return to acting (laughs).

Looking back at the productions you have worked on, is there one epoch-making turning point in terms of the stage music/sound?

I guess it would be *Tensyu Monogatari*. There were more instruments used, and because there was a festive aspect to the play, it was easier to add music, I believe. Miyagi-san says that he “divides the spoken parts (speakers) and the movement (movers), and the Logos and Pathos, and then has them meet again,” and it was with *Medea* (1999) that I felt that all three elements of the Logos and Pathos and music all came together well. It was from around the time of Miyagi-san's Ku Na'uka theatre company production of *Mahabharata* (2003) that he didn't have any objections when I included melodies in the stage music, and since the move to SPAC, I have basically been able to do whatever I wish with the stage music.

How the music is created

I would like to ask you to tell us about your process for creating stage music in more detail. How do you develop an image for the music after reading the stage script?

Around the time of *Tensyu Monogatari* and *Medea* I would think about where to introduce music while listening to the actors during their script reading sessions. After listening to the reading and discussing things with Miyagi-san, I would begin to work on the music/sound after the studio (rehearsal) work began. From the Ku Na'uka production of *Mahabharata* it became a process of creating the music/sound before the studio work began. It was a process in which Miyagi-san would give me the script and say something like, “Read this and start making a stock of music/sound.” Especially since he moved to SPAC it has almost always been a process of making the music first in that way.

In terms of the actual working process, I begin by reading the stage script. As I read, I begin to get a sense of the rhythm of the lines that will be spoken. For example, there is a difference I feel in the speed of the delivery of the actors' line I get when reading a script by Yukio Mishima compared to one by Hideki Noda, and difference

SPAC *The War Chronicles of Mahabharata*
(2014 Avignon Festival)

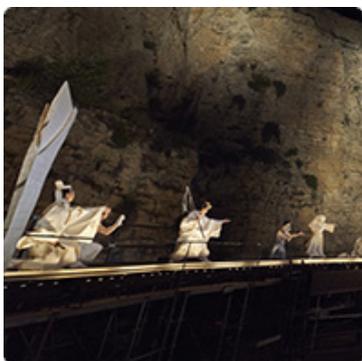


Photo: Ryota Arata

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in the breathing when speaking lines by Kyoka Izumi compared to Shakespeare. So I imagine how the actors will deliver their lines and get an image of what the flow of time on stage will be like, and then I begin to weave the sounds that have come to mind from the text into that flow.

In the case of *Antigone*, which we recently performed again at the 2017 Avignon Festival, when Antigone has resigned herself to death, she calls out to the Stream of Dirce and the Forest of Thebes. At that moment Antigone surely has in her mind's eye the Stream of Dirce and the Forest of Thebes. Just as Antigone has the vision of the stream and the forest in her mind, the audience can use their imagination to conjure up images of the stream and a forest. How can music be used to help the audience imagine these places? I believe it is my job to think about how to do this.

Once when I was watching a play by Romeo Castellucci, at one point in the play a white curtain was lowered and then the word Music was projected on it in large letters. There was no music to be heard on the stage. But, at that time I definitely began to hear music in my mind. This was truly a wonderful theatrical experience for me. It inspired the audience to experience music in their own imagination. This is the essence of theater, I believe.

There are surely musicians who create music or sing because they have a prior idea of something they want to express, but for some reason, I don't have that desire. But, when I read the script of a play, I get feelings that a particular scene is white, or another scene cold, or that another scene should move faster, and I am fascinated by the prospect of changing these sensations into music.

I imagine that there must be some actors who have no experience playing a musical instrument, so do you give some kind of musical training to such people in for the plays you are working on?

From our Ku Na'uka company days we had something that we called basic training in the studio, and in it the actors would first do physical (movement) training, and then after that we would have them practice beating out a rhythm, or practice things like keeping time in 1/16th note tempo as a means of basic training for performing. Once they acquired the basic skills of keeping a beat, then we would move on to the stage of taking their performing to a theatrical level. For this, we rehearse with them how to introduce sound into a stage situation where there are performers performing, how do you communicate something with a single sound you make in such a situation; it is a type of rehearsing that places more importance on the sense (theatric sense) rather than skill (musical skills). I think that, in essence, the volume of sound one begins beating the drum with is something akin the actor's breathing as they are acting.

What is the actual creative process involved when you are creating music [for the stage]?

First I make a phrase and ask person A to start playing it over and over. Then I make another phrase and have B play it on top of A's phrase, and that process continues with C and D add my new phrases on top of A's and B's. Then I write the phrases in each person's stage script in memo form that they will understand. Then I continue to make revisions from there. So, as you can see, it is an extremely "analog" creative

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process (laughs). Working in this way, one piece may take one hour to finish, but sometimes it may stretch on until the first person A I gave a phrase to may have to repeat it for as long as three hours before the piece is done.

When translating the “color” I have in mind into sound, if the image of the sound is different from the color I have in mind, I will say something impossible like, “Try making the sound more concentrated,” or “Try making it more raspy.” Then they will begin searching and come back with a new sound and say, “You mean like this?” When the sound/music begins to take a clear initial form through this process, we try matching it with the speakers’ lines in the script, and then finally we have the “movers” (actors who do only the movement on stage while the “speakers” deliver the lines separately) act their parts to the music. It is then we may see that we may want to lower the volume of the sound somewhat in certain places, or that we want to stretch the piece out longer because the mover is still moving, and we make these adjustments.

At first, I had some misgivings about this creative process where we start by making the music first, but if you think of the stage script itself as a kind of musical score, then it should become possible to compose music from it without actually hearing the speakers read the lines, shouldn't it? And when you hear the actual speaker later and they have a voice that is actually lower than I imagines or speaks at a different tempo than I expected, then I can make the necessary adjustments at that point.

After you have finished composing the music, does the director hear it and say, “No, this isn't what I had in mind.”

Yes. After the music is finish Miyagi-san may often say, “This isn't what I had in mind,” and then I will change it. It then becomes a process of taking the director's image and my image and the expressive qualities the actors bring to it and finding a good fusion. Recently, Miyagi-san seems to be feeling that if he only presents what he is imagining in his own mind, it won't be interesting, so it seems like he is looking at what comes out from me and the actors and then adding new arrangements to it. I think his ability to hold back as long as possible to see what will come out of us is tremendous, but I have to admit that it does make us nervous at times.

In early works, the sound performers were kept mostly out of view of the audience, but it seems that they have a more prominently visible position in the plays recently.

Yes. Since the sound performers' physical presence can become “noise” in the progress of the play, we basically didn't show them in our works in our Ku Na'uka company days. It wasn't until *Mahabharata* that we began to show the sound performers, and I believe it was probably because Miyagi-san began to feel that showing them could give more power to the stage performance. There are moments when the bodies of the performers appear very energetic, so making them visible can be interesting.

Are there times when you object to the movement of the actors when they are performing the sound/music?

Well, yes. If they are getting into the act of performing too much, there are times

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when the movement becomes stronger than that of the play's actors (the "movers") and it becomes distracting, so at times like that I will say that I want them to restrain their movement more. This is something Miyagi-san often says too, the actors need to restrain their movement when they perform, and not move freely like they were a rock band. For example, in the scene from *Medea* where she kills her son, we have them perform with solemn dignity.

Does having experience performing music have an effect on the way an actor acts in a play?

I think it does. Performing music trains your sense of rhythm, and that can improve the tempo and pauses of the delivery of one's lines and make for more skillful acting, I believe. On the stage our performers don't perform alone, they have to listening to the sounds around them, so this gives them the ability to play in ensemble.

As they perform the sound/music they also have to listen to the lines being spoken, watch the action of the play and listen to the sounds around them, etc., so they have to always keep all their senses open, and I feel that will certainly be a plus for them as actors.

Until now, you have worked on many productions with Miyagi-san, and in the course of this, have you found some works that are easier to create music/sound for and some that have been more difficult?

When the play script itself has momentum, it is just a matter of riding with that dynamic, so it is easier to create sound for works like that. For me, the script is my musical score, so if the script itself interesting, I feel it easier to create music for it. In the classics, with their inherent strengths, and works like Yukio Mishima's *Black Lizard* or Hideki Noda's *Midsummer Night's Dream* were very enjoyable for me to work on from the sound creation stage. But, with the play *The White Hare of Inaba-Navajo (Inaba-Nabaho on Shirousagi)* (2016), which was a play that the SPAC actors wrote themselves, I found that even though it was possible to compose pieces for individual scenes, it was hard to get an overview from which to create a flow that carried through the entire play.

New Kabuki *The War Chronicles of Mahabharata*

Your latest work is for the New Kabuki play *The War Chronicles of Mahabharata* (Oct. 2017, Kabuki-za). What did you think when you first heard about this production?

Miyagi-san told me that he was going to be doing a Kabuki play the following year and that he wanted me to do the music for it. And when I heard that, I had no idea what it was going to involve. I like [Kabuki actor] Tamazaburo Bando, so I had been to the Kabuki-za theater to see *Tensyu Monogatari* and the like, but I was really quite inexperienced as a viewer of Kabuki, but I accepted the offer knowing that it would be a completely new challenge for me to take on.

What was it like working in collaboration with Kabuki musicians?

I had my concerns knowing that I was stepping into what was for me a new world of

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*2 Kabuki sound designer

A "sound designer" who decides what musical accompaniment should be used for each scene in a new Kabuki play or a new staging of a traditional play from the Kabuki repertoire.

performance, so I went into it having prepared in advance a stock of a few pieces I made in Shizuoka prepared to do my best. I'm sure I was pretty nervous at first going into this new world where I didn't know right from left. But, as I spent more time in the rehearsal studio, little by little the people there kindly began to talk to me, beginning with Kikunosuke Onoe, the Kabuki musician Denzaemon Tanaka, the shamisen musician Shinji Tsurusawa, the Nagauta style shamisen musician Mitaro Kineya, and many others who were very generous in helping me.

In particular, Denzaemon-san, who is a professional musician of great achievement who did the music for Hideki Noda's New Kabuki and the Super Kabuki production *One Piece*, helped me in many situations. During the actual studio work, Denzaemon-san, who is also a Kabuki sound designer (*2), listened to the stock of pieces I had prepared and helped decide what parts should be played by which Kabuki musicians and at times made suggestions like holding competitions to decide who would be given specific parts.

I hope that the work we did was able to communicate some of the emotional message of the play without destroying the dignity of the traditional Kabuki world. And I am very grateful for the experience of working with the Kabuki people and learning so much about Kabuki music with its uniquely stylized dynamism.

Did the music/sound change when the Kabuki actors started joining the rehearsals?

Not only the music but also the script, everything changed. Changes were made in the music at the request of the Kabuki actors and changes were made in the choreography at the request of the Kabuki choreographer Kikunojo-san, and there were scenes where we didn't know how they would play out until the opening performance, and so there were adjustments made after the first performance. Eventually it was only after about the third day of performances that everything was finally decided.

Is there anything that you feel you gained from that collaboration with Kabuki music?

It was nothing but one gain after another. For example, the musical notation and scores for the musical instrument players, the Gidayu reciter and the Nagauta music are all different, and we are told that they can't even read each other's scores. Yet, although their artistic pursuits differ, they are able to perform together to make the overall performance complete. Working with them and seeing how they are able to help bring out the best in each other despite their disciplinary differences gave me new directions to work toward in my own work going forward.

Workshops for Children and the Communities

Besides your work as a stage sound/music artist, you also do many workshops for children and community groups.

Yes. About eight years ago I got a request from the NPO "Children Meet Artists" to do workshops for children. It is a program to visit a children's home or school for students with special needs or general elementary schools in Tokyo 10 to 13 times per school

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to create original stage performances with the children. These are projects where we use scripts and make stage performances from them that have acting, songs, dance and musical performance. With these projects I want to help children find their roles and places in a creative atmosphere.

For example, in some workshop there may be a child that shows little interest in the acting or dance practice, but when it comes to the costume-making she/he suddenly comes alive and makes a costume with ideas that no adult designer would probably ever think of. There are many times when I am amazed at the ideas they come up and their approach to expression, and it suddenly re-awakens in my senses that I had all but forgotten.

There are also programs like Tokyo Arakawa Ward's "Summer Vacation is for Theater" and the *Ho no Kuni* Toyohashi Arts Theatre PLAT's "Theater Created with the Community" program where all the participants work together with us in an enjoyable environment to create works for stage performance.

What do you do in your workshops?

It depends on the desires of the client, but if we are going to be making an original plot, we can take a children's book or a picture as the starting image and create a story from there. In the case of a workshop where we will be making music, I ask the children what they feel about each scene, whether it has a warm or cold feeling, what color would you use to describe the feeling, whether it is bright or dark, whether the time moves slowly in it or fast, and then we use those feelings to make music for it.

When I am creating something like that with children, once they accept the project, I take several sessions to build a relationship with them. Then I begin to see subtle changes, and that is the part that really makes me happy. Watching them become able to do things they couldn't do at first, arguing on even terms, the frustration of not being able to say what they want. It makes me remember feelings from my childhood with new freshness. I believe that is the origin of [artistic] expression. Being able to share those feelings with children is very important for me. I often feel it has a healing effect for the bruises I get from long years as working in the world of professional theater.

Listening to what you have told us about working with Satoshi Miyagi-san and with children has renewed my feeling that indeed music is communication.

To me, music is one method. You might say that I can't envision music as an end in itself; there is the play script, there are people, there are physical bodies and there are words. It is fulfilling for me if the actors, the stage art, lighting, costumes, sound (acoustics), adults and children all bring out the best in each other and, as a result music is born. It isn't pieces of music I want to create, it may be that it is moments that move people's hearts that I seek.