

My Thoughts on the Performing Arts

Tamasaburo Bando V

First, please allow me to express my heartfelt gratitude for the honor of being awarded the 2011 Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy. Today, I will speak mostly from past writings about my life and work.

Let me begin by telling you how I became involved in Kabuki theater. As a child, I greatly enjoyed moving my body and pretending to be someone else. To be honest, this has been my sole motivation for acting, right up to this day. Once I had become an adult, of course, that alone was not enough of a qualification for performing in public and, so, I started to undertake professional training. However, as much as I loved being physically active as a child, when I was just 18 months old, I contracted poliomyelitis and became unable to walk. I could not take a single step for about three months. Fortunately, mine was a mild case and I was soon able to walk again. According to my personal history, I began taking lessons in Japanese dancing as a method of rehabilitation. This is mostly true, but I am not sure if my love of dancing developed before or after that period. Actually, I would venture to say that it was an ingrained instinct. A dancing master who lived in the neighborhood would visit my home to give me dancing lessons. I did not really like dancing without props but I realized that my body was beginning to get into gear and move smoothly when I put on different attire, or held poles, fabrics, or strings. As I grew up toward adulthood, I found a wider variety of such props, such as costumes and wigs, and I indulged myself in them to the stage where I found myself becoming a professional before I even knew it. But, being a pro means that I do not believe that I should be allowed to do just whatever I feel like doing, regardless, and so it was out of necessity that I began to study my profession more seriously.

(Fig. 1) This is probably the point at which I should talk about my outlook on life, although I don't really think that my world view is especially worthy of attention. In fact, I used to have a hard time relating to the world around me. Ever since I was small, I was terribly afraid of the dark and I could not stand being in a building alone. However, that did not mean that I felt comfortable when meeting, talking, or playing with lots of different people. I don't know why; I was simply born that way. I was able to forget about my personality most easily when I was acting as someone else. When I

was in the guise of another persona, people would not see me but see me playing the role of someone other than myself, and I would feel as if I were not being watched, or even that I had disappeared from this world altogether. Then, I began to see the world from a slightly different perspective, and so I often took on the characters of others. In retrospect, I see that this is how I learned to act and that, by taking to the stage, I deliberately chose to release myself time into a world that is different from reality, a world where I was able to set myself free. After I grew up and became able to converse with others, I developed a conviction that, in a way, as we go through life, we are ultimately heading towards death. Because I was a child with physical disabilities, I developed from a very early stage the sense that all life eventually comes to an end. I also acquired the notion that I would not be able to do what I wanted to do. In other words, as a child I constantly felt the presence of death ‘in the wings’. And, I would say that it is from this background that my outlook on life and death was born.

When you eat in a restaurant or travel, people often say, “Please enjoy your time with us.” However, I think that in the end it might be more enjoyable to let your life pass by quickly. For instance, if you feel that the time you are allotted before you die progresses slowly, you may suffer from the notion that you are heading toward death for a long time. If you are fully engaged in something that you really enjoy doing, the sense that you are living through time that will eventually lead to your death begins to fade away, until suddenly that end point becomes imminent. Then, you do not have the feeling that you have spent a long time in this life. When you are enjoying an excellent meal, for example, you may not be conscious of time. Ever since I was very young and small, I have believed that to live without being aware of the passage of time is the most wonderful thing that can happen to you. In other words, I felt that being constantly aware of the slow passage of time would mean that such time was painful. I personally feel that time passes quickly when I am involved in a stage production or planning to produce something. When I complete such a production and give the performance again and again in front of audiences, I often become completely absorbed as I put my mind and body into the performance. If it makes me feel that time has passed in an instant, I would say that I have spent a very happy time.

When I dance, I feel a sense of floating in the air as if I were flying without gravity dragging down my body and soul. I seek to immerse myself in the world of creativity. It is a feeling of being totally free of any of the shackles of worldly affairs.

I find it quite difficult to explain my outlook on the world, but I have always lived in the world of classical Japanese folk entertainment, which is, in a way, very narrow and exclusive. After I turned 20, I began to have opportunities to work outside

of Japan. Although I did gain knowledge by studying in the school, it was only through traveling abroad that I came to understand the wider world. Through my travels, I discovered that all people have the same feelings and emotions, regardless of differences in language and lifestyle. At the same time, I discovered something paradoxical; namely, that while humans are born into this world, they sometimes seem to be in conflict with the natural order of Planet Earth. I believe that, merely because they have acquired intellect and knowledge, they embrace the misunderstanding that humans are above nature and assume that they can govern its providence, and I think that this is a mistake. I have long pondered such gaps and disparities, and the fact that I cannot fully merge into the world. I think that this has something to do with my world view.

In the world of theater, too, we use the phrase “outlook on the world,” which I believe shares a similar meaning. However, we use the expression to refer specifically to the “outlook on the world” of the time in which a play or drama is set.

In many different countries, various groups of people are trying to live their lives in a positive way. Nevertheless, humans are bound to cause pollution and do harm as we strive to achieve affluence. Probably, as we became used to trading goods for money, we came to believe that only money is of value, eventually losing sight of what we should always be as humans. Each country has its own history and customs, but I believe that such differences have triggered various incidents, problems, and wars. Sometimes, I become so pessimistic that I suspect it is in our nature as humans to be unable to make much progress from there. All humans want to resolve contradictions, choose only what is good for future generations, and improve things that they believe are not good or that they regret, and yet somehow they fail to do so. I think that this is one of the sources of our agony as humans. All the more because of this perception, I have felt happier when creating art and throwing myself into it so that I have been able to constantly put aside concerns about the contradictory nature of human society.

Let me now move on to talk about how I came to be a Kabuki actor (Fig. 2). I entered the world of Kabuki as a child, without the foggiest notion of what I would eventually become and, before I knew it, I had become a Kabuki actor. I think that this is probably the best way to sum up my experience. As I mentioned earlier, I “greatly enjoyed moving my body and loved the theater,” and it was purely the combination of these two impulses that motivated me to take up acting. Because I was physically weak as a child, my parents were very solicitous and, essentially, let me have my own way in everything. As a result, I used to say and do whatever I pleased throughout my

childhood. My parents continued to allow me great latitude after I adopted this profession, in the hope that I would be able to find something that I could focus on and make my own living from. I still have some of that self-centeredness in me but, after I succeeded to the name of Tamasaburo at age 14, my foster father disciplined me very strictly. From that time, I began learning about the manners and techniques that are expected of professional actors, and about the history of Kabuki theater. In accepting this prestigious honor of the Kyoto Prize, I look back on those bygone days and begin to wonder if I have not been busying myself with my own indulgences and priorities without due regard for my family, and so, even as I take pleasure and pride in receiving this accolade today, I also feel some regret. That said, I am now committed to making extra efforts to repay them for their consideration toward me in some way.

When I succeeded to the name of Tamasaburo Bando V at the age of 14, my foster father Kanya Morita XIV told me, “From today, you will be a professional. It will be tough going from here on out.” My response was, “Okay, I am going to be a professional,” without giving it much further thought. Then, at around age 20, a number of senior actors kindly gave me numerous opportunities to play important roles. Being totally devoted to performing on stage day in and day out for so long, I suddenly found myself beyond the age of 30. My foster father was, of course, a Kabuki actor, and my foster mother was a dancer of the Fujima school. She not only gave me dance lessons every day but she was a strict teacher to me, both in my Kabuki acting career and in my private life. It was only later that I came to realize that she had been so stern toward me because she genuinely cared about my future. My foster father passed away when I was 24, but I remember his constant admonitions. He was always saying things like, “When you sit back and rest on your laurels, it’s all over.” and “Don’t allow yourself to be a jack of all trades, master of none.” My senior Kabuki actors would also tell me, “Don’t try to act for the audience. Simply be there in the character.” It was my great fortune to be surrounded by so many wonderful senior Kabuki actors. Whenever possible, they would teach me from their past experience. I was also spoken to by many seniors from other forms of theater, but there is one sentence in particular that I simply cannot forget. When I was 24 I performed as Lady Macbeth—my first role in a translated Western dramatic performance. At that time, I was blessed with the opportunity to have a brief, casual chat with the late Haruko Sugimura of the Bungakuza Theater Company, whom I greatly respected, while passing her as I walked to the rehearsal hall.

“Hello, Ms. Sugimura. It’s been a while,” I said. She replied by asking, “What are you working on at the moment?”

“I’m a Kabuki actor,” I said, “but soon I will be playing the role of Lady Macbeth. Do you think that it is okay for me to do a Shakespeare play?” Then, after a moment’s thought, she answered, saying:

“I also played Lady Macbeth once, and Roxanne, and a part in a Tennessee Williams play. I did everything. You are still young, so you should act all kinds of different roles from here on. Do everything. But, you know, that doesn’t mean you should do just anything. Don’t ever forget that.” Then, she moved on.

It was just a moment of conversation, no more than sixty seconds, but, for some reason that advice kept coming to mind, again and again: “You should act all kinds of different roles, but that doesn’t mean you should do just anything.” If it had been “Take good care of your things,” “Do whatever you are familiar with,” or “Concentrate,” I would not have wondered so much. In retrospect, I realize that this casual conversation contained very profound meaning.

After I succeeded to my current name at 14, the National Theater opened, and I was lucky enough to be given numerous chances to play significant roles. From the age of 24, I was invited to appear on stage by the *shimpa* “new school.” The “new school” is so called because it contrasts with Kabuki, which is regarded as an old school of theater. You might think of it as a new Japanese school of theater, after Kabuki. It was a theater company founded by pioneering figures from the past, including Mr. Rokuro Kitamura and Mr. Shotaro Hanayagi, as well as Ms. Yaeko Mizutani I who sadly passed away recently. While with the theater company, I studied realistic acting as opposed to the stylized performance of the classics. I think it was because I learned to act realistically that I was able to play roles in modern dramas in later years; for example, Sawako Ariyoshi’s *Furu Amerika ni Sode wa Nurasaji*, or *The Cloistered Flower of Yamato Protects Her Kimono Sleeve from the Alien Rain*. I was also fortunate to encounter a drama by Kyoka Izumi when I was just 10 years old. My foster father and Utaemon Nakamura VI were performing in *Tenshu Monogatari*, or *The Castle Tower*. At that time, I happened to be acting at the same Kabuki-za Theater and saw the performance. I was completely entranced by it. Being a child, I did not understand what the play was about but I saw so many unearthly figures on stage giving dark, yet somehow colorful and beautiful performances. How I wished I could have been on that stage! It was at that point that I became intrigued by *Tenshu Monogatari*. Then, in 1977, when I gave my first performance of *Tenshu Monogatari* at the Nissay Theater, I read the original text and felt empathy with it, as if it had been generated from my own thoughts. Every time I perform *Tenshu Monogatari*, I am made to realize that my own thoughts come together in the form of a drama. And, I can

never read other dramas and novels by Kyoka Izumi without being impressed by the fact that he depicted a truly pure, innocent, and beautiful frame of mind. Later in life, I had the pleasure of performing a role in *Yuzuru*, or *The Twilight Heron*, which had once been played by the legendary Yasue Yamamoto, and I came to learn that even some of the briefest words in the Japanese language can have the deepest of meanings.

Let me now take some time to talk about my foster father Kanya and his apprentices. (*Looking at the photo on the screen, Fig. 3*) This man on the left with a bird perched on his hand is my father. As I mentioned earlier, he was a very strict father to me. Looking back, probably because he was also not so physically strong, I think that he was always quick to instruct and teach me after adopting me at the age of 14. It seemed that if he was awake, he was being stern to me. Saying that one's everyday lifestyle can show on stage, he gave me all sorts of admonitions about my daily life, such as how I should pick up and put down my chopsticks, but I did not find his scolding too troubling. The phrase "Self-conceit is the enemy of the arts" was at the core of his teaching. When I was given a chance to play a major role, for example, he would tell me that the worst thing I could do would be to develop a big head simply because of that. He always said, "Do not get puffed up with pride. You have been given a major role but it is not necessarily because you are capable. It sometimes happens that an *onnagata* female role player gets such a role early in his career. He is selected because *onnagata* are few in number and they often attract people's attention more easily." There is another comment from my foster father that I'll never forget. After we performed a new play or saw something extraordinary, we would often exchange opinions and everyone would say things like "That was so unconventional, I really liked that!" On such occasions, my foster father typically nodded in agreement if others were present. Later, when we were left alone, he would turn to me and say, "Shinichi^{※1}, I want you to understand this. You can describe a person as 'unconventional' only when he knows convention like the palm of his hand, yet intentionally breaks away from it. I agreed that it was good because everyone was around, but while that performance may have impressed someone as 'unconventional,' I would dare to say that it simply lacked 'form.' One cannot break away from 'conventions' if there aren't any there to begin with." To be honest, I did not understand what he meant at that particular moment, but I came to appreciate his words after he passed away. As you may know, my foster father was playing adult male roles as a *tachiyaku* while I was an *onnagata*. I think that this was intentional and resulted from his theatrical upbringing. My foster father was only rarely taught directly by his own father how to play certain roles. When he would ask his father to show him

how to play a certain role that he had taught to someone else, his father would reply, “Go to the one that I have taught and ask him to teach you. It wouldn’t do any good if I taught you directly.” Fortunately, because my foster father was a *tachiyaku* and I was an *onnagata*, there were only a few roles that I might have wanted him to teach me directly. I fondly remember him strictly disciplining me. He said, “Because I am a *tachiyaku* I can teach you how a *tachiyaku* would feel, such as what a *tachiyaku* would expect from an *onnagata* so that he can find it easy to perform his role. As such, you should train yourself as an *onnagata* in your daily life. For example, when preparing water for washing your face, it should be neither too hot nor lukewarm. If it’s cold, you should make it tepid, and in summer months you should make it lukewarm. Similarly, before you change into your housecoat in winter, it should be warmed up, and you should avoid leaving them in direct sunlight in summer.” I would now like to talk about two of my foster father’s apprentices: Tamon Bando and Yagoro Bando. A Kabuki actor has his own attendants from his father’s generation. Usually, they are apprentices who remember things about the previous master or forms from the period before his father’s generation, and their job is to help to raise the sons of the family. Both Tamon and Yagoro were my foster father’s apprentices, and so they were always around me. They were only about two to five years younger than my foster father, and thus were of the same generation. They would often tell me things like, “Good actors should have room to branch out. Think of characters written in black ink. Parts of those characters might be blurred. What do those blurred areas reveal to you? Some people are content with printed characters, but what is really important is to be able to find meanings in the curves and blurred portions of the characters.” Being an *onnagata* himself, Tamon taught me all sorts of minor details, something new every day, literally sitting right beside me before a performance or while I was taking off my makeup at the dressing table after a show, telling me things that *onnagata* should know, the proper lengths of kimono to trail, how to adjust the collar, the correct position of the *obi* sash, what hairstyle to wear, the kinds of *mochigami*, or folded paper kept inside the folds of kimonos, that should be used, the costumes that should be chosen for certain periods of history and occasions, et cetera, et cetera. There are simply too many things to list. In retrospect, I recall those two apprentices continually telling me that good actors should be “rounded,” and that such actors should have depth and class. For instance, when I would walk and handle the hem of my kimono at an acute angle, they would say, “You’re not acting out the character properly. The way you handle the hem does not have any sense of ‘roundness.’ To avoid drawing too much of the audience’s attention to the act of handling the hem, you should control the flapping of your kimono so that

no one notices it.” They also said, “Just because you think you have attained a ‘form,’ that does not mean that you should flaunt it in front of the audience. You should not try making your voice heard simply because your voice carries far. You should not give an awkward, angular performance.” I don’t know why, but I cherish those words so much. Perhaps “cherish” is not the proper word, but those words would pop into my head at every opportunity, and I simply couldn’t forget them. All things considered, my tentative conclusion about such things is this: an actor learns technique, form, how to make one’s voice heard, and all sorts of methods, but, once he is in front of the audience, the ideal effect is for those watching to wonder if he has ever rehearsed or has any techniques at all, and it is best if he does not give a merely explanatory performance, instead causing the audience to wonder if he is acting or not. In other words, it is best if the audience simply sees him come on stage, naturally inhabit that space, and then leave, instead of him making a big show of his performance technique.

We have many old sayings in Kabuki circles. One that has been handed down by actors says that “No actor can be successful without a good face.” Now, the “face” here does not just mean physical appearance. In the world of classical theater, we say that we “do our faces,” meaning to “put on our makeup.” (Fig. 4, 5) So, the saying can be paraphrased as, “No actor can be successful if he has poor makeup.” But again, I don’t think this simply implies that an actor must do his makeup neatly, but rather it means that he should create a face that fits the role accurately and concisely. Another saying goes, “Never foul your *kesho-mae*.” *Kesho-mae* is a term used by Kabuki actors to refer to the small area in front of the dressing mirror, including the dressing table, *zabuton* cushion, and everything else there. They say that, if things are scattered all around, cosmetics are spilled, white powder is scattered about, or containers are left here and there after use, the actor will never achieve success. This is a matter of course for craftsmen, artisans, or anyone else who is involved in the creation of “beauty,” but it has been said that unless everything is put tidily back where it was after use, this will have an effect on one’s acting. So, people say that the value of an actor can be judged from a quick glance at his *kesho-mae*. I don’t know if I am a good actor or not but, because of that saying, I have always liked to keep my *kesho-mae* very tidy, and I think that one can acquire good habits in this way.

By profession, I specialize in *onnagata* or female theatrical roles. I would like to take some time to talk about how it is that such performers are still a fixture in Oriental countries, and about the roles of *onnagata* in our modern times (Fig. 6). It is very hard to explain this subject logically, but please allow me to try. It is thought that

the originator of Kabuki theater was a woman by the name of Izumo no Okuni, who began performing in Kyoto. Rumor had it that she was closely connected to the Tokugawa shogunate family and was well-educated. I imagine that she may have performed *nembutsu* dances for events held in the inner sanctum of the shogun's palace, because she would have been one of the few who had permission to access that restricted area, where the women of the shogun's entourage were accommodated. If such were not the case, I find it difficult to accept that a mere female dancer could earn such a place in history as Izumo no Okuni, and be praised to this day as the founder of Kabuki theater. After her time, young male actors began playing female roles in Kabuki theater. Izumo no Okuni was a woman, but for the last 350 years or so, performances by *onnagata* have been the norm. Marking the original performance by Izumo no Okuni, Kabuki theater celebrated its 400th anniversary in 2003. And it has been some 250 years since more sophisticated Kabuki programs—especially so-called “classic programs” such as *Sagi Musume*, or *The Heron Maiden*, and *Dojoji*, or *The Dojoji Temple*, which are still performed today—were created and adult male actors began to play female roles. I have yet to gain a clear understanding of why performers like Kabuki *onnagata* exist in many Oriental countries and here in Japan. It is true that male actors often impersonated women in ancient Greece and medieval Europe, but those cases mostly involved young boys playing female roles. I still haven't been able to develop a clear vision of how we can continue to hand down this legacy, which now exists virtually only in this part of the world, but I am determined to put all I have into passing on the wonderful, instructive teachings of our forerunners in the best possible way. I believe that my mission as a Kabuki actor is to play a role that helps to provide solace to people as they work to overcome the many hardships in their lives. This is something that I always try to keep in mind.

I now wish to share some more of my thoughts about this with you. In Europe, there are opera houses where ballet and opera are taught, and acting schools, such as those specializing in Shakespearean plays, and students study there until they complete their courses. In Japan, however, some universities will offer classes on the classics but, as far as I can tell, there has not been a single school that specializes in such works. My dream is to see an educational institution founded in Japan where the Japanese classics are taught in a systematic manner, regardless of whether or not *onnagata* roles are included in the curriculum. In the past, such teachings were handed down orally by individuals, which helped to spread Japanese dance and music throughout the towns, culminating in the birth of specialists who then created the classical Japanese popular performing arts. However, in contemporary society, with so many different genres

available to us, we no longer have a breeding ground to foster and stimulate selection of the classics from among the wide variety of popular entertainment forms. Such being the case, I fear that we cannot expect the classics to flourish and prosper without some kind of commitment to their future. Hence, I hope to see the development of an educational facility where students can specialize in the classics, conduct research, learn about their history, and quickly acquire specialized and efficient techniques, or an educational institution with a conducive environment where students may learn the essence of the classics simply by living their lives there.

Now, I would like to talk about acting in Kabuki theater (Fig. 7). We Kabuki actors often talk about *katachi*, or form, which I would describe as an optimal method that has been elaborated by many actors over a long time. To use an analogy from everyday life, it would be “wisdom for living.” In other words, *katachi* is something that puts together various elements capable of conveying a certain drama, period in history, and role in the most effective, concise, and optimal manner. Based on this definition, I do not believe that such a *katachi* was in existence 350 or even 250 years ago. Rather, it has gradually been shaped to become what it is today. I say this because, in various interviews relating to this occasion I have been asked if my task is to “bequeath the classics to future generations in their established form,” or if Kabuki still remains “as it was in the past” or “unchanged.” While I cannot assert that “it will change,” I also cannot be sure if it still remains “unchanged.” For example, Kabuki was originally performed in natural light or by candlelight, but today it is frequently staged in huge halls like this one. It is simply impossible to reach the audience in a contemporary setting without changing anything. The original intent of the classics can still be communicated to the viewers if we infuse a universal human spirit from the period when the drama was written into the performance of the play, and if we also act out the drama in a way that efficiently communicates to today’s audiences. Nevertheless, I think that certain forms have changed over time.

(Fig. 8) Looking back over the history of Kabuki theater, one can see that those in our fathers’ generation passed on Showa-style Kabuki before and after the Second World War but, from the latter half of the Showa period through the onset of the Heisei period, our senior actors started to pass away, in quite rapid succession. There have even been cases where we became unable to inherit the *katachi* that had been handed down for so long. We do have videos and recordings but, unless you are highly experienced, attempting to study how to play a role merely by watching videos

and listening to recordings will only result in learning the superficial forms without any true understanding of a given interpretation or nature of the role. This means that the fundamental nature of certain roles could eventually be forgotten. For several years, to compensate for this loss, I have made a habit of compiling notes. My belief is that, so long as an actor understands the nature of the role and interprets the role correctly, it does not matter if he chooses to use a variety of forms. It can even be more interesting because you can see different interpretations of the same role by different actors. In a sense, Kabuki theater has done whatever was necessary to please the audience and, in fact, it borrowed some elements of Bunraku puppet theater and Noh performances. Some of the works by Nanboku Tsuruya and Mokuami Kawatake are particularly spectacular. There are *henge-mono*, where one actor plays multiple roles, split personalities, and surprise endings— these were all written to please the viewers. However, I have come to realize that, in playing a role, you must also have consistency, which serves as a sort of foundation. Having such a solid foundation in your performance is also necessary in order to please and impress the audience and to provide spiritual solace.

We Kabuki actors often act out roles of people from the past, and a drama set in such a period is called a *jidaimono* (Fig. 9), or historical play. I find it very hard to explain what a *jidaimono* is, but let me address the most important concept underlying it. To play a person in *jidaimono* is to “represent a person from a period in the past.” In other words, you must become an expression of a person whom you have never met or seen. In such cases, it is important to impress the audience with the fact that the person carries a great deal of time and space on his or her shoulders from the moment he or she appears on the stage. Maintaining a non-explanatory, detached appearance, yet carrying the time and space of the past on your shoulders with your attire helping to sustain that atmosphere of time and space—the need to help the audience to easily understand these concepts is one of the things that make *jidaimono* so difficult. Conversely, *jidaimono* gives us true joy if we succeed in achieving that result. And so, to be able to carry the time and space of history on your shoulders, you need to do your homework on that time and space or watch how your seniors played that role. Or, you might study history, see drawings of such persons, or read stories about them. Then, you need to use your imagination to be able to take all of those things upon your shoulders. If you are successful, the audience may instantly comprehend the time and space without you even acting as that person, and this is what makes *jidaimono* truly challenging. You cannot simply come on-stage and play the person; rather, you are

obliged to make the audience “feel” that you are a person from that era, from the moment you appear. To accomplish this effect, you need to consider such aspects as appropriate makeup, costumes, movements, wigs, hairdressing, manner of walking, atmosphere, appropriate music to herald the actor’s appearance on stage, and general casting. If all of these things are in place, as soon as the curtains open the audience can be instantly transported 200 or 300 years into the past, or even 1,000 years as in the case of works like the *Tale of Genji*. If this is accomplished, it can be safely said that the *jidaimono* has been successfully conveyed. In other words, if that condition is able to be maintained until the curtains close, the audience will enjoy the experience of spending those two or three hours in a space 1,000 or 500 years in the past. I believe that this is what *jidaimono* can accomplish.

Let me move now to what I learned from drawings (Fig. 10). First, I am a naturally tall person. By the standard of Japanese actors in the past, I am 15 centimeters or even 20 centimeters taller than their average height. People used to say that I was not suited to be an *onnagata*, or they would tell me when I was younger that I could not become an *onnagata* because the ratio of my head to my total height was one-to-seven or one-to-eight. Even worse, because I was thinner than I am now, someone pointed at me and said, “Look at that beanpole” as soon as I appeared on the stage. To become an accomplished *onnagata*, a male actor dressed as a woman spends time learning how to look like a woman as he tries to convert various details into those of the opposite sex. A female persona appears after he has encapsulated his aspirations as a performer into it. The form must be trimmed little by little while practicing assiduously in the ways of moving one’s body and everything else. In my case, I also looked at many drawings of women in order to develop a personal image of what a beautiful female should look like. From my youth, I viewed many *ukiyo-e* pictures in order to grasp how women lived and looked in the Edo period. I wanted to “feel” the women of those times by looking at *ukiyo-e*. There was another reason for looking at drawings. When I began performing on stage in my teenage years, some critics said that I “did not look like an *onnagata*” because I was too tall and my face was too small. It was around that time that I discovered women in *ukiyo-e* and Japanese drawings. If you look at *ukiyo-e* works such as Mikaeri Bijin, or “A Beauty Looking over Her Shoulder,” and works by Kiyonaga Torii and Harunobu Suzuki, you find tall, slender women with small faces. *Bijin-ga*, or pictures of beautiful women, created by Shoen Uemura of Kyoto and Yumeji Takehisa from the Taisho period, were also like that. I myself found beauty in them, and was convinced that people in the Edo period admired

such women as being attractive. Then, I thought it would be wonderful if I could reproduce through my own body the ambience of a woman with such an image. It is important not to merely try to emulate those women. After all, the figures depicted in drawings are the interpretations of an artist, and did not actually exist as shown. Sometimes, they involve exaggerations, and some poses cannot be reproduced by the human body. Take *Mikaeri Bijin* as an example. I do not think that anyone can actually assume that posture. One might then ask, “So, what did you want to learn from them?” Speaking abstractly, the things I was trying to understand were the facial expressions, contours, and the atmospherics that combine to create the beauty in the drawings. As much as I learned from senior actors, I also learned a great deal from illustrations from the Edo period.

I would now like to talk about my obsession with colors. I think that, even before I began my career as a Kabuki actor I was very particular about colors. As you know, colors can change the ambience depending on how they are combined. In a Noh play, the combination of various hues matters a great deal. The actors study how to play a role by picking out different colors from among costume materials handed down through the generations. I have to say that there is one thing about colors in Japan that I cannot bring myself to accept. When I was about five or six years old, at a time when Japan was experiencing rapid economic development, fluorescent lights began to be used in private homes. Up until then, I had been spending much of my time in a dressing room at the Kabuki-za Theater, which was lit by electric bulbs. However, when I was six, my real father replaced the bulbs in my room with fluorescent lights, which he said were brighter. Suddenly, the atmosphere in my room changed completely—all of the familiar colors were gone and everything looked different. I did not know why, but I asked him to bring the bulbs back, which he did. Then, everything in the room was back to the shades that were so familiar to me. From that time, my father continued to use incandescent lamps in our house, except in the bathroom. Of course, it is not just electric bulbs that I am particular about. Basically, sunlight should be the principal source of illumination and, for evening theatrical performances, candlelight should be the standard lighting technique. We now have fluorescent tubes emitting light that looks natural, but I strongly feel now that, if one aspires to be an artist, one needs to determine colors under natural lighting conditions. In Japan, fluorescent lights have been the primary lighting device since their debut, which makes it very difficult for people of our times to choose colors properly.

Allow me to briefly touch on theaters (Fig. 11). Not surprisingly, I highly value theaters constructed with timber. I believe that, back in the Edo period, theaters generally had 500 to 1,000 seats; over time, the seating capacities of theaters have grown larger and larger. People believed that the Kabuki-za Theater was too large. One reason for this was that, if an actor has to walk an additional two meters to enter or exit the stage, it will take another 10 seconds if he is walking slowly. For six actors it will take 60 seconds longer, and for 60 actors the time increases ten-fold. The result is that the play duration is extended. We contemporary actors have to take this into consideration and modify plays by assuming how things were in the small theaters of the past.

If you should ask me about my memories of the Kabuki-za Theater, I would tell you that, essentially, I was raised there (Fig. 12). Ever since I was a small child, I dreamed of acting standing on a revolving stage, taking a stage elevator, or emerging from one of the gaps in the stage as the spirit or monster characters would. I am truly glad that my wonderful dreams have come true. At present, the Kabuki-za Theater is being renovated, but it will reopen the year after next. I am thinking about what I can present there when it opens again.

I have also played a role in Kunqu Opera (Fig. 13), which features the Chinese equivalent of *onnagata*. I adore Mei Lanfang, and I discovered Kunqu Opera while I was doing research on that Chinese actor.

Thus far, I have been blessed with so many mentors from many different walks of life. From the list of past Kyoto Prize laureates, I have made the acquaintance of Mr. Andrzej Wajda, Mr. Peter Brook, the late Mr. Maurice Béjart (Fig. 14), and the late Ms. Pina Bausch. Needless to say, I enjoyed a close friendship with the late Mr. Tamao Yoshida. I am now considering how I can and should contribute to the performing arts. I need to hand down what I have learned to those that will follow me. I also think that I should move deeply into directing and producing. This means I will have to decline a certain number of acting jobs and use the extra time created thereby to carry on the traditions of my occupation.

Let me speak briefly about the sea (Fig. 15). I truly love the sea, and I often go to the beach in order to get some healthy exercise. The sea truly is wonderful. Astrophysicist Dr. Sunyaev^{*2} gave his lecture before I took the podium today. To tell

the truth, I was once as interested in space development as I was in acting. I naturally enjoyed science and mathematics a great deal, but was not very good at literature, Japanese, or social studies. In fact, I have basically lived a life without books, with the exception of dramas. However, when I swim in the sea, I can forget about all those things and really regenerate my body and spirit (Fig. 16).

Last, but not least, I wish to share my thoughts on Kyoto (Fig. 17). When I was younger, Kyoto for me was just the Minami-za Theater and the area around it. It encompassed the world of cuisines, and the world of *geiko* and *geisha* unfolding in Gion and Ponto-cho, which surrounds Minami-za. While I spent a pleasant time there, I was ignorant of the existence of the “outer” world of Kyoto. This is partly because the people that I met in such places were several generations senior to me and also because I was kept busy working on the stage in those days. I did not have the time or energy to make the rounds of places in Kyoto. As a young actor, Kyoto was something of a distant world to me. However, when I reached my 40s, I began to walk around Kyoto, making many friends and acquaintances from my own generation in the city. I met with painters, craftsmen, chief priests of temples, chefs, embroidery technicians, and textile technicians. They had reached the age at which they represented the core roles of Kyoto. Having friends that shared a similar point of view served as a major catalyst for me to come to know the depth of this city. They not only taught me but also showed me the “depth” of Kyoto, about which I was too shy as a young person to ask people who were much older than me. Watching beautiful textiles being finished, learning the history of the amazing pottery and ceramics, and seeing the landscape that lies at the very heart of Kyoto—it was a fantastic experience of witnessing the processes that Japan has cultivated over many centuries. I became convinced that the true origins of the culture and arts of Japan were in Kyoto, and that everything I find wonderful about this country has its fountainhead here.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

※1 Tamasaburo’s real name

※2 the 2011 Kyoto Prize laureate in Basic Sciences

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