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INSIGHTS FROM ASIA

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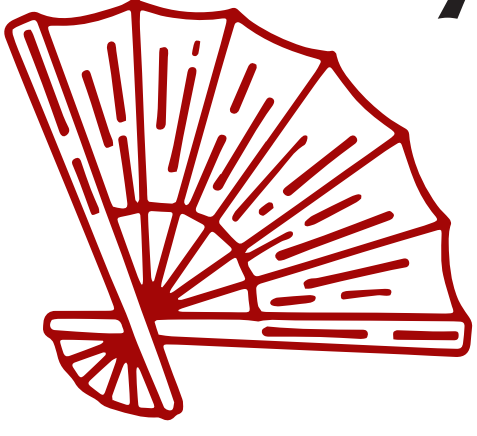
'A Mountain in Escape,' painting by Hua Liu.

40 years



of *traditional theater training* in kyoto

JONAH SALZ

Students, teachers, and staff of the 2024 T.T.T. Program.

Who teaches strenuously in the height of the summer? Who would be mad enough to endure six steamy weeks in July and August of intensive practice of classical dance and theatre forms all towards a recital on an outdoor stage in the furnace of Kyoto's summer? Teachers asked this question when Rebecca Ogamo Teele and I first floated the idea of Traditional Theatre Training (T.T.T.) in the summer of 1983. Previously, we had been contacted occasionally by professors and artists misguidedly asking to be introduced to *nō* and *kyōgen* teachers for a few weeks of one-on-one lessons, so that they could videotape and "master" the

forms on their own. Arts in Japan are traditionally taught in a master-disciple transmission process that is intense, intimate, and long-term, an osmosis that only occurs one-on-one. Rebecca and I discussed how we could best replicate this intensive experience during the short vacation times when foreign scholars and artists could join, and teachers were relatively free.

Early Adjustments

T.T.T. developed its model in consultation with nō master Udaka Michishige from the Kongō school, and kyōgen comedy actor Shigeyama Akira. Normally these actors were busy, teaching daily at culture centers, mentoring amateurs and their children at home studios, and rehearsing for professional performances. Summer was the only time they were free from most obligations. Their offer: if we could gather a group of six to ten paying students, they could make their mornings available for practice sessions, 10:00-13:00, avoiding the overwhelming afternoon heat.

Thanks to grants from The Japan Foundation in the 1984 inaugural year, sixteen eager artists, graduate students, and J-culture vultures, primarily from the U.S., attended the program. At the time, the word "workshop" was just beginning to be recognized as a meaningful gateway and tune-up tool for theatre practitioners in Japan. Still, many—


TRADITIONAL THEATRE TRAINING

TRADITIONAL THEATRE TRAINING

'86

THIRD ANNUAL RECITAL

第3回 T.T.T. 発表会

能・狂言・小鼓発表会
8月21日(木) 4:30-9:00pm
●会場 八坂神社 (京都・祇園)
指導 能 宇高通成
狂言 茂山千之丞
茂山あきら
丸石やすし
小鼓 久田舜一郎

AUGUST 21, 1986 (Thursday) 4:30-9:00 PM
YASAKA SHRINE
Kyoto, Gion
NOH, KYOGEN, SHOULDER DRUM
(su-utai, shimai, kyogen, komai, ren-cho)
Instructors:
Kongoh School (noh) — Michishige Udaka
Okura School (kyogen) — Sennojo Shigeyama, Akira Shigeyama, Yasushi Maruishi
Okura School (shoulder drum) — Shunichiro Hisata

日本舞踊発表会
8月23日(土) 6:00pm-
●会場 アートスペース無門館 (京都・下鴨)
指導 藤間勘素女

August 23, 1986 (Saturday) 6:00 PM
ART SPACE MUMONKAN
Kyoto, Shimogamo
NIHON BUYO
Instructor:
Fujima School — Kansome Fujima


Early T.T.T. Recitals were held at the outdoor nō stage at Yasaka Shrine. This photo is from 1984.

including our teachers—were skeptical of the notion that a mere six weeks of compressed training would be sufficient to prepare even Japanese disciples for a recital of *nō shimai* (dances), *utai* singing, short kyōgen plays and *komai* dances, let alone foreigners who mostly lacked Japanese language ability. Yet, to their astonishment and pride, the students succeeded admirably. The first recital at the Yasaka Shrine nō stage was well attended and broadly covered by newspapers and local television stations. The angle: "We Japanese should be ashamed to see these foreigners appreciate our art more than our own young people and should take more pride in our ancient traditions." In 1985, *nihon-buyō* classical dance was added to the curriculum, and *kotsuzumi* (shoulder drum) was offered as an optional afternoon class.

Students could also join the Noho Theatre Group's workshop of productions of Beckett, Synge, and English kyōgen, held just a week after T.T.T.'s final recital. However, it proved challenging for students, pressured to become sponges for the traditional lessons, to immediately change to active agents of creative expression in the Western mode. After 1986's T.T.T., with over one hundred applicants and 31 participants, Udaka and Ogamo split from T.T.T., forming the International Noh Institute (INI) to concentrate on a single art form. It continues today with Udaka's sons, organized by "adopted grandchild" disciple Diego Pellecchia.

Over the decades, T.T.T. has adapted to changing circumstances, with nō teachers from four schools (Kongō, Kanze, Kita, and Kanze again) and three different buyō teachers (from the Fujima, Nishikawa, and Wakayagi schools); while the Shigeyama kyōgen lead teacher position has been passed down from grandfather Sennojō II to son

Top: Students are offered the chance to take an additional mini-course in *kotsuzumi* (shoulder drum) alongside the course they are primarily enrolled in. From left to right: Noam Meiri, Joey Nolan, Oana Ghiorgilas, Francesca Lerz, Tiziano Kirchner, and kotsuzumi teacher, Takahashi Naoko. Photo by Yovela Delvin.
Right: Kyōgen students Joey Nolan and Ania Kepka rehearse the play *Shibiri* (*Pins and Needles*). Photo by Yovela Delvin;
Left: *Nihon-buyō* students Chris Ellars and Gracie Shreve rehearse the dance *Kurokami* (*Black Hair*). Photo by Araki Miki.
Bottom: Nō teacher Ōe Nobuyuki teaching the *rengin* (choral piece) of the play *Yoro* (*Eternal Waterfall*). The students will sing this song on stage at the recital, accompanying head nō teacher Katayama Shingo's dance.
Photo by Mars Jones.

Top to bottom: Kyōgen students Gracie Shreve and Tiziano Kirchner rehearse the play *Shibiri.* Photo by Yovela Delvin; Kyōgen student Jacopo Veronese practices in his role of Tarō Kaja. Photo by Yovela Delvin; Nō teacher Ōe Nobuyuki corrects Oana Ghiorgilas' form for *Kiyotsune.* Photo by Yovela Delvin.
Opposite: Nō student Francesca Lerz rehearses the shimai *Hagoromo (The Feathered Robe).* Photo by Araki Miki.

Akira to grandson Sennojō III, likewise with the shoulder drum, from grandfather Hisada Shunichiro to daughter Yasuko with granddaughter Ami joining the teaching team this past year. In 1990, T.T.T. shifted to a more manageable three-week program, and in 1999 began enrolling Japanese participants as well. In 2002, with the creation of the internationally-minded Kyoto Art Center (KAC), T.T.T. became officially sponsored by Kyoto City, which was now responsible for programming decisions and resolving housing headaches. Instead of the inconvenient and hot *keikoba* practice rooms of Yasaka Shrine or teachers' home studios, T.T.T. classes have since been held in the air-conditioned, mirrored rooms, both hardwood and tatami-mat, at the downtown KAC, formerly the Meirin Elementary School. For eight years, from 2016-2023, Matthew W. Shores took the reins as program director. In 2025, Ph.D. candidate Jane Traynor will lead T.T.T. into its fifth decade.

Yamamoto Mayumi, now vice-director of KAC, was instrumental in 2022 in adopting T.T.T. as a sponsored program. For her, T.T.T. represented "a place to build an international network and opportunity to reconsider Japan's traditional performing arts from a new perspective." The tasks of bilingual promotion, visa correspondence, house-hunting, interpreting, and recital production have not been easy, however. As described in the 2024 Recital Program, "T.T.T. has become one of the core activities for the Art Center to nurture artists, and although it is a calorie-consuming job that requires much labor, we believe that there is value that can only be obtained through this program, one that cannot be evaluated by so-called 'cost/performance' and 'time efficiency.'"

Life-changing Career Trajectories

Hundreds of actors, playwrights, directors, designers, and musicians, as well as graduate students and professors, have attended T.T.T. over the past 40 years. About one-third of each summer's students are repeaters. They come primarily from Western Europe and North America, but recently also from Southeast Asia. Since bilingual promotion was instituted in 1999, about a fifth to a third have been Japanese, many of whom are experiencing traditional theatre for the first time, excited to be training alongside international students. And for non-Japanese, it is always comforting to observe that *seiza* kneeling for long periods, formal *kamae* posture, and *suriashi* sliding walk are as challenging for young Japanese participants as for them.

T.T.T. has had a deep and wide impact on individuals and institutions. For performers, there are myriad ways in which T.T.T. has influenced their artistic careers. Some

have adapted principles of nō in their acting classes; others use masks and nō storytelling techniques to adapt tales from their own homelands. Still others, like myself (Noho Theatre Group), Dan Furst, Joseph Houseal (Parnassus Dance-Theatre), Simon Woods and Lynne Bradley (Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre) have utilized traditional Japanese forms to interpret Greek, Roman, and Shakespeare plays and to produce bilingual kyōgen. Playwrights see how traditional Japanese performers bring physical expression and musical intonation to the text. Scholars graduate from T.T.T. with the fundamentals of the art that they can then convey to their students, enriching their theoretical writings with the experiential learning gained from the program. Past scholars include Eric C. Rath (University of Kansas), Reginald Jackson (University of Michigan), and Barbara Sellers-Young (York University). Some literature specialists "convert" after T.T.T. turns them towards performance-enriched research in dance and theatre, among them Julie A. Iezzi (University of Hawai'i) and Deidre Lammers Onishi (University of Oklahoma). Takahashi Naoko, who studied nō and kyōgen after a background in modern theatre, went on to become a professional shoulder drum player and current T.T.T. teacher. Furthermore, T.T.T.'s model of intensive, short-term workshops has been adopted by Ogamo's INI (Kyoto), the International Theatre Institute (Tokyo), Japan Centre (Tokyo), PIP (Oregon's Portland State University), TTRP (Singapore), and Noh Training Program (US/Tokyo/UK).

Mutual Influences

Often, traditional arts are envisaged as rigid, perfected forms being poured whole into the empty molds of disciplehood. However, even with audio-visual archives available, lineage, generational, and personal innovations continuously occur in this transmission process. These variations are especially evident in T.T.T. because, unlike with master-disciple training, we have been fortunate to have two or three professionals per class, each offering slightly (sometimes completely!) different models of correct form. Sometimes assistant teachers consult students' notes or videos to determine the head teacher's model. Moreover, differences in participants' temperaments, body sizes, learning strategies, and artistic sensibilities determine a far more varied outcome that might be predicted from mechanistic imitation. When varying linguistic and cultural knowledge are added to these filters, one can readily see how the T.T.T. experience leads to fascinatingly original recital performances.

I have noticed that, when training begins, students invariably take photographs and videos, fill notebooks, and ask questions. But after two weeks, they are quiet, attentive, shadowing the teacher during other students' lessons, listening constantly to the lyrics, dialogue, or music through earbuds. Sprawling, snacking, and chattering in the early stages of training, they later grow subdued, empty vessels absorbing the techniques and spirit of their meticulous but endlessly patient teachers. Awkward non-dancers learn to perform less robotically with energy flowing through each separate movement; dancers who quickly master the required steps learn the subtle nuances of fan-tilts and pace changes, not merely riding the chanted accompaniment but leading it with their individual interpretations.

For teachers, T.T.T.—which began as a summer job during a relatively quiet time in their young careers—has become important lifework. It has provided a chance for international outreach right in their home studios, and the enjoyment of watching the many fruits it has born when performers return to their home countries.

T.T.T.'s long-term master-teachers have developed the uncanny abilities of Olympic coaches to mentor students of varying abilities with a learning trajectory that peaks on recital day. Wakayagi Yayoi, who has taught Nihon-buyō for 12 years, regrets that when she first replaced the prior teacher on short notice, she over-emphasized the basics of posture, gesture, and footwork. By the time students had reached an acceptable level, she had to scramble to choose a suitable piece from the repertoire and get them to recital level. After three years, she was able to achieve a better pace and after five, she had developed an original methodology designed for T.T.T. that differed from the one-on-one training by nō and kyōgen teachers, one that would ensure that each student was able to perform with confidence on stage after three weeks.

Teachers born into traditional families, accustomed to learning by imitation since an early age, found that the forms they took for granted are best taught to non-Japanese using different methods. Katayama Shingo developed a sense of which students to mold physically, whom verbally, and whom to be strict with. He now recognizes the need to explain Japanese concepts verbally, and reasoning behind balance, elegant appearance, and practicality—such as how fan movements practiced in everyday wear must be exaggerated, so as not to hit the kimono sleeves in later performances.

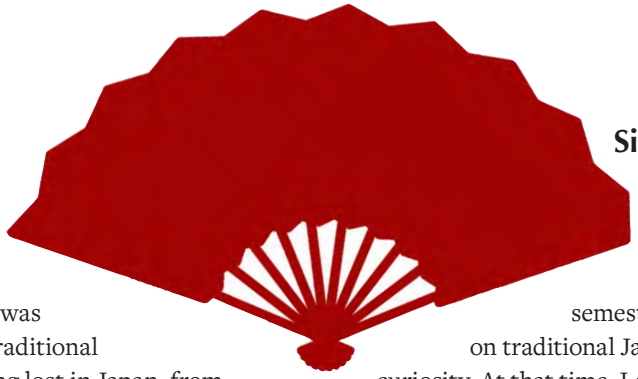
The three current nō teachers, rather than modeling correct posture and movement (*hakobi*) for students to imitate, have each developed explanations and exercises to achieve proper form. Tamoi Hiroyuki shows students that, by bending forward 90 degrees, then bringing their back, chest, neck and head up while maintaining their low center of gravity, students will achieve the correct "still presence." Tamoi further instructs, "don't think about bringing the arms and hands out in the curved *kamae* stance; they will naturally go there if your posture is correct, but if you are consciously trying to create the curve, they will become too narrow and stiff." Katayama Shingō says that he learns from watching other teachers' methods (another bonus not afforded in normal training), suggesting, "Although it seems impossible, with proper posture, your navel should face the floor." Ōe Nobuyuki explains, rather than merely demonstrates, the correct suriashi glide, common to most traditional forms, carefully analyzing the shifting of weight on the heels. He then challenges everyone to maintain their horizontal solidity by walking in suriashi with a fan balanced on their heads. Katayama feels these new methods "are necessary to adapt to the spectrum of body types in T.T.T., and different ways of learning."

The international, bilingual atmosphere of T.T.T. has influenced the development of younger teachers. Shigeyama Sennojō III, now head of the kyōgen course, was one year old when T.T.T. began and recalls being surrounded by international participants from infancy. Spurred by his grandfather, Sennojō II, T.T.T.'s first kyōgen class leader, and father Akira, the second class leader and co-founder of the Noho Theatre Group, Sennojō III has become a uniquely cross-cultural performer, sketch-comedy playwright, and collaborator in bilingual kyōgen and international productions such as *Tom Sawyer Paints a Fence* (2019), *Faust: a Confession* (2023), and *Blue Moon Over Memphis* (2024).

In 2024 T.T.T. celebrated its 40th anniversary recital with felicitous dances and songs, and then a special collaboration of all four genres in a one-time-only extravaganza. The nō play *Shakkyō* (*The Stone Bridge*) was adapted to *Shishi ranbu* (*Lions' Wild Dance*) by two nō teachers, two kyōgen teacher cubs, and a buyō teacher, with full drum and flute orchestra. This celebration of determination, generational power, and highly unusual genre-crossing fusion was a fitting tribute to T.T.T.'s uniquely energetic and transformative first four decades.

SPECIAL THANKS to Jane Traynor for her invaluable help editing this article.

comments by T.T.T. participants



Sekimoto Ayako
Arts manager,
Ph.D. candidate

I started to study nō with foreign participants in T.T.T. It was good to learn about Japanese traditional performing arts, which are being lost in Japan, from a global perspective. In particular, I am interested in the fundamental philosophy of nō as the physical expression of songs and dances. Not only humans, but also plants and nature are included in nō and kyōgen songs, providing a key to understanding the worldview of the medieval people of Japan. I believe that learning about the pre-modern way of life is an indispensable education when we shift from a human-centered society to a society that considers the entire planet. By performing nō and kyōgen, I realized why Lévi-Strauss and Yeats were interested in nō. Through discussions with foreign participants, I have discovered new value in Japanese traditional performing arts.

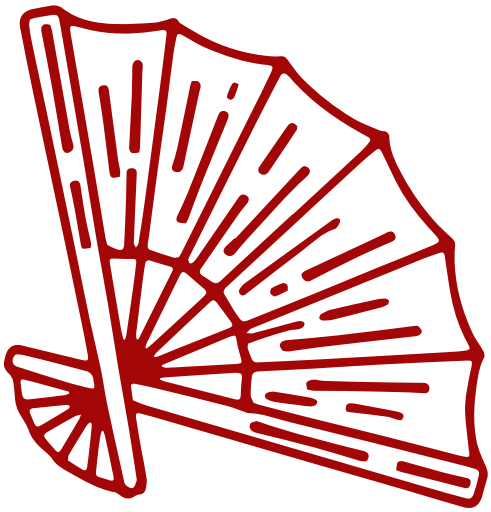
In addition to the content of classes, there is a unique camaraderie. T.T.T. creates relationships. Participants develop friendships and build trust with their teachers. Every summer I am happy to reunite with my friends, especially one from Ukraine. They bring new ideas and inspiration. I think this is an invaluable opportunity as an artist and researcher.

In many parts of Japan, traditional performing arts are being lost. Despite the difficulty of learning traditions, traditional performing arts remain in a stable form in Kyoto. I think T.T.T. is an intensive training opportunity for people living in Japan to learn about traditions.

Siming Lu
Chinese playwright,
M.A. student at NYU

In my final undergraduate semester in the US, I took a course on traditional Japanese theatre out of natural curiosity. At that time, I didn't know where this interest would lead me, but it all became clear after coming to T.T.T.

Kyōgen, which I studied in 2023, inspired me to incorporate movement design into my playwriting, where I found success. However, embodied experiences brought on other surprising discoveries. My second year of training (2024) went much smoother than my first year because I could "see" more things, such as the "fan," which serves as an instrument of etiquette and transforms into various objects during performance. My strong impression of the fan is largely due to the kyōgen teacher Yamashita Moriyuki's repeated corrections of my gestures while holding the fan during my first year. I practiced for a long time, reversing the fan position while ensuring my pinky or thumb were pressed to the pivot (*kaname*). Later, I realized that by focusing on the fan's position throughout a performance, I could capture more details of the dance. Using a fan in performances feels both familiar and foreign to me as a Chinese person. The fan in T.T.T. reminds me the important props in traditional Chinese theatre, like the essential ones in Chinese opera, "a table and two chairs" (一桌二椅). I want to hold on to this feeling of estrangement in order to explore the materiality of stage props in my future work and re-examine "natural" properties in different theatrical cultures. These props, which may appear as neutral, everyday objects, are actually culturally determined. For me, T.T.T. is far more than physical training; it is a community sharing a liminal space of in-between potential, where we can extensively discuss how Japanese performance traditions inspire us. It offers newcomers like me (without knowing the Japanese language) an accessible yet respectful way to enter the world of traditional Japanese theatre. T.T.T., in turn, reminds and enables me to revisit the traditional theatre of my own heritage.



Jonah Salz

Program director 1984-2015, 2024

T.T.T. had a huge effect on my life. I had started the Noho Theatre Group with young actors of the kyōgen Shigeyama family and Kita school of nō, joined by Kyoto and Osaka residents and local Irish and American actors and designers. But foreigners moved home; their part-time English teaching jobs prevented them from rehearsing regularly; they wanted their summers off for family time, while I had begun my Ph.D. at New York University with only summer months to return to Kyoto. T.T.T. brought in wonderful actors, singers, and designers from around the world who, after their traditional practice, engaged in collaborative performances with Japanese masters of Beckett, Yeats, bilingual kyōgen, and new works in Noho (Noho Workshop) productions at Studio Varie, Art Space Mumonkan, and on the Kongō Nō Stage. Annual March tours by Noho to the U.S. attracted new T.T.T. participants, who expanded Noho's offerings in a virtuous circle. Enriching my own research, during T.T.T.'s week-long orientation courses, I was able to learn from senior scholars Samuel L. Leiter, Benito Ortolani, Laurence R. Kominz, and Richard Gough, joining other graduate students and artists to explore the current traditional forms in historic context.

As Director, and now Program Director, I have been privileged to work with unfailingly generous and energetic teachers who themselves are stimulated by the energies and new interpretations of their repertoire by non-Japanese initiates. Watching their varied teaching pedagogies, precise *kata* that nonetheless allowed for individual "flavor," influenced my own teaching and directing practices.

John G. Davies

In 1984 I was living in New York City. One evening I came upon a performance of nō theatre theatre outdoors at Lincoln Center. I was struck by the atmosphere and beauty of the masks and costumes. The following day I bought Donald Keene's translations of nō plays and felt I had come upon the eastern equivalent of the Greek plays that so inspired me. I then had the opportunity to attend T.T.T. in Kyoto. This was my first six-week workshop, and I have since returned three times, working with Rebecca Ogama Teele and the late Michishige Udaka, master actor of the Kongō School.

On returning home, I created the New Zealand Noh Theatre Company which has performed three New Zealand Noh plays. Principles and perspectives of nō became woven throughout my practice; my understanding of its embodiment of ritual, spiritual otherworldliness, and story has guided me.

When tasked by New Zealand Opera to direct a new work, I wanted to avoid the usual approach of singers taking turns to enter, sing, and leave. So I kept the singers on stage, like performers in nō, where they would sit, when not singing, in their embodied state of alert neutrality, retaining relationship to the space, the audience and their character.

The dramaturgy and structure of nō influenced my solo play. In nō, the power of the *waki's* presence draws forth the *shite.* In my play, the Narrator begins discussion about genealogy, then through an archaeological object, another character appears and tells a story. Then, with my back to the audience, I layer on three robes that express my own artistic genealogy: a blue kimono, a Montrose tartan kilt and a grey robe with Māori amulet. Finally, I put on the mask before turning to dance the final sequence. Nō continues to guide and inspire my work.

All photographs on opposite page and next by Lane Diko.

Siming Lu performs the dance *Kyō no shiki* (*The Four Seasons of Kyoto*) at the T.T.T. 2024 recital.

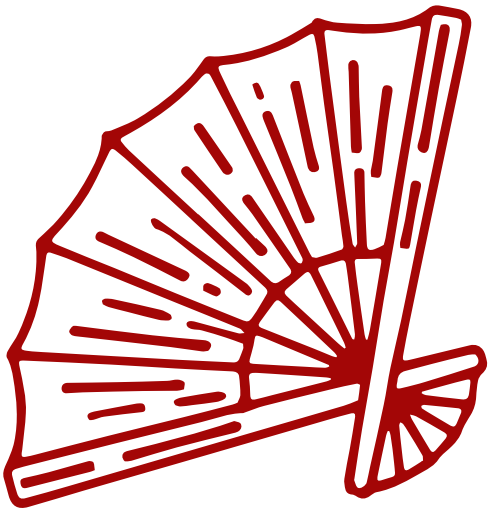
Gracie Shreve performs as Tarō Kaja in *Shibiri* at the T.T.T. 2024 recital.

Noam Meiri performs as the Master in *Shibiri* at the T.T.T. 2024 recital.

Student Jacopo Veronese in the role of Tarō Kaja while kyōgen teacher Suzuki Minoru observes in the supporting role of *koken* at the back of the stage.

Shikichi Osamu performs the shimai in *Hagoromo* at the T.T.T., 2024 recital.

Svitlana Rybalko performing the *nihon-buyō* dance *Kyō no shiki* at the T.T.T. 2024 recital.



Jane Traynor

Ph.D. candidate at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa
T.T.T. Participant 2016, 2019, 2023; Assistant Director 2024; Program Director 2025

T.T.T. changed the trajectory of my career not once but twice.

My first year was a gift from my M.A. supervisor who encouraged me to apply to support my research on *kata* ("fixed patterns"). Sources in English on kyōgen were (and still are) sparse, so embodied experience and interviews with teachers would supplement my theretofore bibliocentric approach. My experience proved not only enjoyable, but also confidence-building. Memorizing lines of classical text, engaging with teachers in Japanese, dancing and singing—in front of an audience to boot—all things I would normally be scared out of my mind to do, I somehow did. So, when I was asked at the *uchiage* party, "Have you ever considered pursuing a Ph.D.?", suddenly, something I had only toyed with became a very real possibility.

Fast forward three years. I had finished my M.A., a year of intensive language training in Japan, and the first year of a Ph.D. program abroad. I was also, due to some unfortunate circumstances, feeling defeated and ready to quit, questioning my abilities as both scholar and person. Nevertheless, I had committed to returning to T.T.T.

This second time was different. I was no longer bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, but in exchange for my naiveté I had gained perspective, knowledge, and strengthened my language skills. I was able to communicate with teachers and Japanese students and help bridge cultural gaps my non-Japanese peers were struggling with. I loved it. The last fading ember inside my heart, all but set on leaving grad school, was suddenly reignited. I grew eager to find a path forward to continue doing what I loved—making traditional Japanese performance accessible. T.T.T. administrators and teachers encouraged me to look into the Asian Theatre program at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, assuring me that it would be a better fit—and they were right. Now as a Ph.D. candidate, I am amassing the experience and qualifications necessary to pursue my goal day by day. Hopefully, I will be privileged enough to keep facilitating experiences that are just as meaningful for future T.T.T. students as they were for me.

Akira Shigeyama

Kyōgen actor, T.T.T. instructor, 1984-2019

T.T.T. students are more enthusiastic about Japanese traditional arts than the average Japanese. Of course, since they came from overseas to study it, that's obvious. But from the perspective of realistic acting, Japanese stylization can look totally exceptional. Then when they begin training, they realize how much of what they do on stage is unnecessary. I realized that the influence of 19th-century Western Japonisme, where artists were inspired by Hokusai's prints, could extend to theatre artists in the 20th and 21st centuries. Similarly, foreign students could also influence my work.

Performing arts of the next era may be seeking harmony between reality and style. The original stylistic aspects of actors from the Sengorō Shigeyama family have grown more realistic over the past 70 years. In other words, the reality line is changing! I believe I have followed these changes within the family and see T.T.T. as a stepping-stone into a new theatrical world.

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