

Asian Performing Arts Festival

Participant Interview #04

Yuko Kondo / Actress

Yuko Kondo participated in Nguyen Hoang Tuan's team from Hanoi. Although as an actor, she has been participating in a collaboration project with a Singaporean playwright since last year, she started the Festival's collaboration project with anxiety at first, knowing that the Vietnamese team hardly spoke English.

“I do not understand Vietnamese at all, and I had difficulty communicating with them directly. In spite of that fact, I kind of understood Mr. Nguyen's directives in Vietnamese during the rehearsals. When I showed him what I understood using body language without the help of an interpreter, he gave me a big nod.

When participating in a new project as an actress, I begin by exploring a common language between the director and myself. What Mr. Nguyen was seeking was clear from the first day. During the rehearsals, I would first show him through my gesture what he wants to express, and then ask him 'How about this?' It was an interesting creative process for me.”

Last year's experience of the collaboration project in which she translated the Singaporean play into Japanese with the translator, the director, the actors and the playwright was helpful, too. The literal translation of the English lines into Japanese often deviates significantly from the original nuance when placed within the context. Kondo's role was to rewrite such lines through the body of an actor.

Nguyen did not use written scripts, and the actors had to think and come up with the lines on their own. When she mentioned that the choice of the Japanese words differs depending on the historical background, Nguyen asked her to “use the words that enables the audience to understand the relationship between the characters.” Kondo thus suggested the use of the word “*anata*” to indicate the relationship of a married couple.

Not only did Kondo not understand the Vietnamese language, but she had never been to Vietnam. However, the Asian Performing Arts Festival's collaboration project prompted her to become interested in Vietnam, and at the end of the project, she came to feel quite close to the country.

“I had a chance to be involved in Vietnam for the first time, and its presence grew inside me. Maybe the artists are not Vietnam itself, but the realization that these people live in Vietnam, and the cultural characteristics of the country that I could see through them greatly changed my impression.

It was as if I actually travelled to Vietnam and had a first hand experience of the country. As if I smelled the flavor of a country called Vietnam.”

In addition to participating in the creative scene as an actor, Kondo also participated in the discussions among the Asian theater directors with great interest.

“The Round Table's theme, 'Artistic Quality v. Audience Accessibility' was interesting for me, too. Mr. Nguyen constantly thinks about feeding the 100 or so members of Thangong Water Puppet Theatre including the musicians. In Japan, the actors often cannot live on the income from acting alone, and I had several discussions with Mr. Nguyen on that subject.”

For Kondo, she was able to participate in the Festival at a “perfect timing.” The practice of thinking what one can and should propose as an actor in an environment where strangers with different nationalities and cultural backgrounds come together to create a piece became a major hint for her own career.

“It is not just about having a motivation such as liking the work or the director, but about what I am capable of as a professional actress. I kind of understand now the stance and the direction the actors have to have in order to work with all kinds of plays and directors. I think this will be an important theme for myself from now on.”