



**Tadayoshi Kako**

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The public-service organization, Japanese Association for Conservation of Architectural Monuments Founded in 1971. In 1976 it was designated as a select organization for the preservation of technology for "Building Restoration" and "Building Carpentry." In addition to conducting restoration of buildings of National treasure and Important Cultural Asset status, the Association engages in surveys of historically important buildings, assessments of earthquake resistance of structures of cultural asset status, formulating plans for the preservation and use of such buildings and training of technicians to work in this field. The Association has also engaged in international cooperation projects such as planning the restoration of the World Heritage site Candi Prambanan (Prambanan Temple Compounds) in Indonesia following the Central Java Earthquake. As of April 2010 that Association has a staff of 97 people. Through restoration work, the Association transfers restoration technology for cultural assets to local construction companies and contractors.

<http://www.bunkenkyo.or.jp/>

## Artist Interview アーティスト・インタビュー

June 11, 2010



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Before the advent of modern theater facilities, the common venue for performing plays in Japan was a traditional wooden building with a stage known as a *Shibaigoya*, or "playhouse." The oldest extant example of the traditional *Shibaigoya* playhouse is the Old Konpira Kabuki Theater (*Kyu Konpira Ooshibaï*) (built 1835) in Kotohira-cho, Kagawa Prefecture. This is a theater complete with the stage mechanisms used in Kabuki performances in the Edo Period (1608 – 1867). Many similar *Shibaigoya* playhouses were built during the ensuing Meiji (1868 – 1912) and Taisho (1912 – 1926) periods that served not only as theater houses but also as popular venues for a variety of different types of events and performances where people gathered. With the changing times, however, most of these playhouses were eventually torn down. Others survived by being converted to warehouses or undergoing renovations as the buildings aged, leaving about 30 of these traditional playhouses extant today around the country. Of these, five are designated as National Treasures or Important Cultural Properties by the Japanese government. Kako Tadayoshi of the Japanese Association for Conservation of Architectural Monuments (JACAM), a public-interest organization specializing in the restoration of buildings of National Treasure or Important Cultural Property status, has headed the projects to restore two of the most important traditional playhouses, the Yachiyozza and the Old Konpira Kabuki Theater. We spoke with Mr. Kako about the world-leading wooden building restoration technology applied in these projects and the appeal of the old playhouses.

(Interviewer: Kazumi Narabe)

### Origins of the *Shibaigoya* playhouses

You have conducted two major restoration projects in recent years, one being the 1996 – 2001 restoration of the 100-year-old Yachiyozza playhouse in Kumamoto prefecture (built 1910) and the other being the 2002 – 04 restoration of the Old Konpira Kabuki Theater (common name: Kanamaruza) that was moved from its original location and refurbished in 1975. When we speak of traditional Japanese theaters, many foreigners who have visited Japan might envision the Kabukiza in Tokyo's East Ginza district. In fact, the Kabukiza is a ferroconcrete structure built in 1951 to replace the Kabukiza that burned down in the large-scale incendiary bombing of Tokyo near the end of WWII. Now, the current Kabukiza has been closed down for reconstruction as

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### Shibaigoya playhouses

*Shibaigoya* are playhouses for the performance of play that are built in the traditional Japanese style. Designated as Important Cultural Asset, the Old Konpira Kabuki Theater (common name: Kanamaruza) built in 1835 Kotohira-cho, Kagawa Prefecture is said to be the oldest extant playhouse built in the Edo-period style with the stage equipment of the period. Playhouses of this type have audience seating consisting of *masu-seki* (a flat central ground-floor area of chessboard-like square seating areas with grass “goza” matting on wooden flooring), *takadoma* (an area of seating surrounding the *masu-seki* area at a slightly higher level) and the more expensive 2nd-floor *sajiki-seki*. There are also stage devices including a *hanamichi* runway extending from the back of the audience area to the stage for actor entrances, an overhead scaffolding called a *budodana* (a gridiron made of bamboo) above the stage and extending out over the audience seating area which stagehands can climb out on to drop showers of paper “cherry blossom petals,” and a circular revolving stage. Construction of this type of Edo-period playhouse continued throughout the country into the Meiji Period.

These playhouses were not intended only as theaters for Kabuki performances but served as comprehensive culture centers for events such as music concerts and town meetings by political figures. However, the big changes in lifestyles and tastes in entertainment among the Japanese after World War II, brought a decline in business for traditional playhouses. As traditional storytelling, music and theater lost popularity, many playhouses converted their seating areas into rows of benches and were operated as movie theaters. But the period of commercial revival brought by movies soon ended with the emergence of television and many playhouses were closed down and eventually demolished or turned into warehouses.

Today, only about 30 playhouses remain. With the success of the “Konpira Kabuki” performances by popular Kabuki actors in 1985 at the Old Konpira Kabuki Theater, citizen movements to restore old playhouses and make them usable again as theaters for performances have begun around the country. Since then, the Yachiyoza built in Yamaga city, Kumamoto Prefecture in 1910 financed by a stock issuing by local merchants and

of April 30th and, unfortunately, by the time this interview appears on our website that building will no longer be seen by the public.

Later in the interview we would like to ask you to tell us in detail about the restoration of playhouses, but to begin with I would like to ask you tell us something about the origins of Japanese *Shibaigoya* playhouses. If my understanding is correct, the Japanese word *shibai*, meaning the place where a play or other type of performances are held, derives from the fact that people sat on the grass (*shiba*) on the grounds of temples to watch performances of religious dances. In other words, is it correct to assume that the roots of traditional Japanese theater lie in outdoor performances?

Yes, that is correct. And then it evolved. First with a roof being built over the stage and then with the more expensive seating area being covered with a thatch woven of straw or reeds. Though you might think of such thatch as something full of holes that would let the rain through, it is actually rather effective at keeping out the rain because the water flows along the straw or reeds to the outer edges of the thatch. Even when the roofing eventually covered the entire seating area, at first it was only a covering of thin wooden shingles. From the records we have today, it appears that the *Shibaigoya* playhouses of the Genroku era (1688 – 1704) had their main pillars replaced every year. That means that they were little more than make-shift shacks with no foundation. It wasn’t until the Kyoho era (1716 – 35) that you had real architectural structures with tile roofs. I believe it was around the 9th year of Kyoho (1724) that the first of these structures appeared.

Although there are a number of theories, it seems that no one knows for certain when the first playhouses with what you might call sound architectural structures were built.

I believe it was the famous Edo Period magistrate Ookaechizen (Ooka Tadasuke) who first caused playhouses become solid architectural structures as a fire-prevention measure. At the time, fire fighting was actually a matter of strategic demolition of houses to prevent the spread of a fire through the town. As a rule, tile roofs were prohibited in Edo Period towns because falling tiles could injure fire fighters when they were breaking down houses to prevent the spread of a fire. But, Ookaechizen was devoted to fire prevention and, in addition to organizing civilian fire-fighting squads, he also promoted the use of tile roofs as less flammable than wood-shingle roofs.

At first, the theaters had what was known as an “oyster-shell roof.” As a simple form of fireproofing, the wooden-shingle roofs were covered with a layer of mud, and to keep the dried mud from washing away in the rain, a layer of oyster shells was added on top of the mud across the entire roof. Because of the size of theater roofs, theater owners were first told to make them oyster-shell roofs. Later, Ookaechizen told the theater owners to put tile roofs on their buildings.

When that happened, the managers of the three biggest Kabuki theaters in Edo (old Tokyo) decided to ask for permission to expand the audience seating area in their theaters, which was forbidden at the time without government approval. To put tile roofs on their theaters was an expensive proposition from the theater managers’ perspective. It required that they first strengthen the foundation and pillars to support the weight of a tile roof. So, they decided to take advantage of this edict to tile their roofs and use it as a reason to expand their seating capacity in order to raise the capital necessary for the construction. I believe that is what led to the rapid change to architecturally sound theaters in this period. And, that is why I say that the real start

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the Korakukan built in the same year as an entertainment center for the mine workers of the town of Kosaka in Akita Prefecture have been designated as Important Cultural Assets. Other playhouses still in use today are the Uchikoza built in Uchiko-cho, Ehime Prefecture in 1916 by local leaders and the Kaho-gekijo restored in the Showa Period in the city of Izuka in Fukuoka Prefecture. These and other cities with old playhouses have joined to form the National Shibaigoya Conference (*Zenkoku Shibaigoya Kaigi*) to promote preservation and use of these buildings.

*Zenkoku Shibaigoya Kaigi* website (Japanese only):

<http://www.sunfield.ne.jp/~shibaigoya/index.html>

of Japanese theater architecture began in the 9th year of the Kyoho era thanks to the reform efforts of Ookaechizen.

Can we assume that this change to architecturally sound theaters also enabled the development of the *hanamichi* (stage entrance bridge), the rotating stage platform and other unique stage devices that came to be used in Kabuki?

With the make-shift playhouses used until that time, which had to be re-constructed every year, there was no way that they could develop sophisticated stage devices. It wasn't until the Horeki Period (1751 – 64) in the latter half of the 18th century and the advent of structurally sound theaters that there was a rapid development in stage devices. I suspect that it was the shift to tile roofs that influenced this change more than anything. Since this is an area that has not been dealt with academically, as yet, I intend to write on this subject eventually.

But, Kabuki was born and raised in make-shift playhouses where the common people could enjoy theater, so even after the theaters became architecturally sound structures, they retained a rustic informality much different from the Baroque theaters of Europe built in castles. It wasn't until the theater reform movement of the Meiji Period that theaters were designed and built as impressive works of architecture.

The “cultural enlightenment” policy of the Meiji period (generally to modernize the country after Western standards) extended to the world of Kabuki as well. There was a rethinking of the tendency toward highly romantic, fanciful plots in Kabuki plays and Kabuki artists like Kanjuro Ichikawa IX and others created to historical plays that were truer to historical fact and theater owners like Kanya Morita XII build the first theater employing Western style architecture in 1878.

The Kabukiza built in 1889 also had a Western style exterior. However, after the Imperial Theater opening in 1911 as the country's first full-fledged Western style theater, the people in Kabuki realized that they had to differentiate themselves and avoid copying the Western trends, and that is when they began to return to Japanese style theater building. The first manifestation of that was the so-called “Momoyama style.” This had nothing at all to do with the actual [architectural] style of the Momoyama Period (latter half of the 16th century) but was actually an attempt to achieve an impression of Edo Period shrine and temple architecture. However, because the aim was to recreate the image of glorious elegance associated with Momoyama art, they called it “Momoyama style.” The representative building of this style is the Kabukiza in Ginza that is being torn down from the end of April this year (2010).

So, you are saying that when they decided to return to Japanese style architecture they chose the shrine and temple architecture as the best of Japanese traditional architecture?

At the time, there was an outstanding architectural design department for shrine and temple buildings in the Ministry of the Interior. Under the state sponsorship of Shinto religion adopted after the Meiji Restoration, the Ministry of the Interior not only provided funds for the reconstruction of high-ranking shrines around the country but also provided the architectural planning and design. The Ministry's design department was dedicated to designing and constructing the finest shrine and temple architecture possible drawing on the very best elements of the 1,500-year history of Japanese

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Old Konpira Kabuki Theater (common name:  
Kanamaruza)  
(National Important Cultural Assets)  
Venue: Otsu1241, Kotohira-cho, Kagawa  
Prefecture



Photo: Kazumi Narabe

architecture. In contrast, the Ministry of Education dedicated itself to the preservation and maintenance of existing cultural assets as they are. From the standpoint of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of the Interior was creating buildings that had never actually existed in the history of Japanese architecture. From the perspective of Ministry of the Interior design department, however, the Ministry of Education would be considered lacking in design capability; in other words, they weren't artists (laughs). The Ministry of the Interior was dissolved after WWII, but you will still find architectural designers in architectural offices specializing in shrine and temple design whose training derives from the prewar Ministry of the Interior.

**What are some of the representative buildings designed by the Ministry of the Interior?**

The Meiji Shrine in the Harajuku district of Tokyo is a prime example. If you were to describe it in the most general terms, the Meiji Shrine combined a Middle Ages type silhouette is based on Kamakura period architecture, which conveys the greatest sense of strength and vitality, with sculptured portions that reflect the florid beauty of the Momoyama Period and fine detail portions that reflect the best of Asuka Period (592 – 710). Another big design element is the sculptural design that connects even further back to ancient Greece and Rome.

As for the Kabukiza, we can call it one of the masterpieces of ferroconcrete architecture designed to have the appearance of a wooden structure, and I consider it one of the representative creations of the Ministry of the Interior architectural design school. For that reason, I think it is a building that would have been worth saving as a cultural asset. I'm sorry that it is going to be torn down.

I believe that the Kabukiza and the Yachiyozza reflect the dichotomies of Meiji Period. The former is an example of architecture promoted by the central government and the latter an example of the architecture of the common populace. I believe that polarization of culture in the Meiji Period exemplified by the two extremes of architecture by architects who learned to build outstanding brick and stone buildings at the Imperial University and the wooden structures built by common carpenters in the traditional style is something that still exists today. On the one hand you have the Kabukiza as a theater of the great metropolis of the capital and on the other a traditional playhouse built in a regional town in a style dating back to the Edo Period. The reason I will miss the Kabukiza is because it represents the end of one of those two traditions. But I don't think that losing the Kabukiza means we have lost one of the representative examples of the Japanese style playhouse. Because, there are now people who are working hard to preserve the old playhouses around the country that retain the old Edo Period style.

**The representative examples of that old Edo Period style are the Kanamaruza and Yachiyozza. How many other playhouses of the old style exist today?**

They say that there were about 3,000 in their heyday. Some researchers say there were even as many as 6,000. Today, there are about 30 left, including some that are in very bad condition. Anyway, it means that virtually 99% of the Japanese have lost access to these playhouses.

**Five of those 30 playhouses are now designated by the national government as Impor-**

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tant Cultural Assets. Among the various types of Important Cultural Assets, what kind of position do these playhouses have?

It was in 1898 that the Meiji government began concerted efforts to preserve cultural assets, and with regard to architecture specifically, it has been the temples that have been the most important manifestations of the history of Japanese architecture. The next most important is shrines. For this reason, the vast majority of buildings that were designated as cultural assets before World War II were temples and shrines. There were only two residential estates in the country that received the designation, and of course no playhouses did. At the time the prime reason for “cultural asset” designation was historical importance, technical excellence, exemplary beauty, etc. In other words, they were buildings of beauty and excellence. Since the residences of the people were essential commodities of daily life, they weren’t considered to be in the realm of cultural assets. After the War, however, we saw a gradual broadening of the definition and scope of cultural assets. Particularly in the period of Japan’s rapid economic growth in the 1960s and ’70s, there was development going on all around the country that was threatening the existence of many traditional homes, so we were faced with a situation where we had to expand the definition of cultural assets to include traditional residences.

Kanamaruza was designated an Important Cultural Asset by the national government in 1970. That seems rather late, doesn’t it?

It was scholars of arts history not architectural history that were aware of the existence of Kanamaruza. They knew that without a doubt it was the only existing playhouse built in the Edo Period. But, because playhouses were traditionally cheaply constructed buildings, they were not considered eligible for cultural asset status under the old value system. It wasn’t for another 20 years after the Kanamaruza that the Yachiyoza in Yamaga city, Kumamoto Prefecture was finally designated an Important Cultural Asset. When I was assigned to be in charge of the dismantling and restoration of the Yachiyoza, the president of Japanese Association for Conservation of Architectural Monuments (JACAM) at the time was the late Dr. Hirotarō Ohta. Dr. Ohta was like a god in the field of Japanese architectural history, and when I asked him about the points I should be aware of when restoring it, in essence he told me that it would be a difficult task because the building itself was defective. Wooden playhouses were fundamentally weak buildings structurally. In terms of contemporary structural calculations, the audience seating simply cannot be covered with an adequate structure. That is what Dr. Ohta meant by a defective structure.

Although it may have an impressive facade, behind that it is still a jerry-made building. It is fully of the entrepreneur spirit of gaining a big profit from a small investment and not the kind of building that would be chosen as a cultural asset under the old standards of technical excellence and exemplary character as architecture.

That is the tradition of temporary jerry-made structures. Since a playhouse is a place that sells the dream of making a big profit from a small investment, it should be impressive in the parts that the audience sees, while the rest can be cheaply built. In other words, it is at the opposite extreme from the temples and shrines built by skilled *miya-daiku* carpenters as places of worship to the gods and Buddha.

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Yachiyozza

(National Important Cultural Assets)

Venue: Yamaga 1499, Yamaga-city, Kumamoto Prefecture



Photo by Yachiyozza

### Dismantling and restoration of Yachiyozza

I have heard that the buildings you are most attracted to are Zen temples, but since leading the restoration of the Yachiyozza you discovered the appeal of such a “defective building” and since then have participated in the surveying and restoration of playhouses around the country. What type of playhouse is Yachiyozza?

In its facade it is a 2-story building with a tile roof, and below the peak of the A-shaped main roof is a drum platform for the large drum that was used to call people to the plays. Over the entrance are hung boards for paintings advertising the plays. Inside the entrance there are places to leave your shoes to the right and left and then you enter a flat area of *tatami* mat audience seating that is sectioned off in squares like a chess board. Around that is a raised seating area sort of like balcony seating, with strings of paper lanterns hung on the periphery. The stage has a width of 13.4. The audience sits not on chairs but on [cushions on] the floor, so there is little difference between the height of the stage and the seating area and the eye level of the audience is higher than the stage floor, making the actors’ feet visible to the audience. The stage is also equipped with the usual devices of Kabuki theaters, including the *hanamichi* (bridge for stage entrances) and a [circular] revolving stage floor. The Edo-period Kanamaruzza has the same basic structure, but since Yachiyozza is a playhouse that wasn’t built until 1911, it has quite a lot of Western influences, such as a proscenium arch and a gas-lamp chandelier. And the wheels of the revolving stage were made in Germany.

How do you go about restoring a playhouse building of that type?

When it comes to restoring wooden-structure buildings, Japan has some of the most advanced technique in the world. The technique and processes we used with the Yachiyozza restoration was exactly the same as with other buildings that are designated as cultural assets, including shrines, temples, residences and castles. First of all, measurements are made of the building in its present condition and architectural blueprints are drawn up based on those measurements, and at the same time a survey is made of damage to the building and the state of disrepair. We determine the direction of any leaning in the pillars and where the floor has been sinking, and this reveals the weak points in the building. Then we begin to dismantle the building in the opposite order from how it is constructed. In this process, each and every piece removed from the building is inspected. Old buildings like these have been repaired many times over the years, so there is no such thing as a cultural-asset building that remains in the same state in which it was first constructed. However, since these buildings are also works of art, the greatest value basically lies in the form it had when it was original built.

Yachiyozza is a building that was repaired and refurbished numerous times in its history as well. Did you try to restore it to its original form?

Since Yachiyozza has been designated an Important Cultural Asset as a wooden-structure theater built in the Meiji Period, showing people a Yachiyozza with renovations made in the [current] Heisei period would not give them the taste of Meiji culture they have come to see. This was a restoration project, so the main purpose was to repair the building, but an equally important purpose in a case like this is to try to

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restore the building to its original form when it was first built.

A restoration project requires academic surveys and research. We can never expect to find any remaining architectural plans of the original building, so we basically survey the evidence of past repairs and renovations remaining in the existing building materials as the building is dismantled. For example, there may be a place where there is now a window in such a building, but when you look closely at the neighboring struts you find the remains of wall plaster indicating that it was originally a wall section that was later cut out to install the window. So, to restore the building to its original form, you have to remove the window and plaster it over as a wall section again. However, if that strut was not an original one but one from a later renovation, then your restoration would be mistaken. Therefore, the first thing you have to do is to assess the age of all the structural parts [materials] remaining in the building as you dismantle it. In the case of the Kanamaruza that was moved and restored in 1975, a total of 130 parts of the building were restored. It was about the same with Yachiyoza.

Isn't it difficult to determine the age of old building materials?

It is not difficult to tell the difference between a 100-year-old pillar and a 10-year-old one, but you can't tell the difference between a 100-year-old pillar and a 90-year-old one just by looking at them. There are a number of factors for judging the age of materials, but the most reliable and objective one is the number of nail holes in them. When mounting a roof rafter on a beam, the first thing the carpenter does is to drive in a nail to hold it in place. If leaking rain causes the rafter to rot, but not the thicker beam below it, the carpenter who comes to repair it removes the rusted nail, throws out the rotten rafter and then nails on the new rafter. When he does that, he drives in the new nail at a point a little distance away from where the original nail was. Then, when the building is dismantled later and the dust is wiped off, we find the replaced rafter has only one nail hole but the beam has two nail holes. That means the two pieces are from different periods in the building's history. If both pieces only have one nail hole it means that they are from the original building when it was first built. But there are cases where there are two holes in all the pieces of the building. That means either that the building has been dismantled and moved once or that it has been dismantled once and repaired. If the parts have three holes each it means the building has been dismantled twice in its history.

I can envision a beam having a number of nail holes, but do you count all the nail holes in the entire building when dismantling it in a restoration project? If so, how many did Yachiyoza have?

By the time the dismantling is finished we have marked all the nail holes with chalk. For example, if it was the current hole it may be marked in blue and a previous hole in white. By the time we had finished dismantling Yachiyoza, we had marked about 500,000 nail holes. It took half a year in all.

Besides the nail holes, I am told that you mark and number all the tiles and timbers and other parts and check the condition they are in to decide if they can be used again, that certainly must be a painstaking job.

It is. You can't do it if you are the kind of person who gets bored easily. It is a menial job, but it is also one that demands a lot of care, because you can't damage any of

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the pieces. Good carpenters are taught to work fast and build a clean, precise building, and they are not trained to take buildings apart while surveying each piece carefully. So, after about a month on the job, everyone has grown silent. For that reason we have to do things to keep the morale up, like having a drinking party every now and then or reporting the things we have learned about the building at the end of each workday thanks to their diligent work.

There were about 10,000 pieces in all to the Yachiyozu. As we check all the nail holes we look for traces of past work done on the building. Most of the pillars and beams of the Yachiyozu were the original ones from when it was built in 1910 (Meiji Period), but about 10 percent of them were from the time when an expansion was made on the building in 1924 during the Taisho Period. Only 2 or 3 percent were from the later Showa or Heisei periods.

When the original Meiji-period pillars and beams were investigated for evidence of changes, we found actually quite a lot of evidence of the existence of previous parts to the ones at the time of the dismantling. There were even some places where there was a confusing mix of several traces of previous work in one place.

From these traces we tried to determine which were the original ones from the time when the building was originally built. We find that the chisel work in the joints with the cleanest cuts is on the original beams. But we are not able to tell the original work. We can't tell which of the chisel work from the second and third renovations is the older. So, we have to turn to other peripheral evidence such as the layout of the building overall to make those decisions. It is a matter of using both the "micro eye" for investigating the individual work traces on the wood and the "macro eye" that sees the building as a whole, through the repeated processes of the dismantling work and surveys, in order to eventually get the entire picture of how the building and its history.

At the same time you are "reading" the history of the building in that way, do you also conduct surveys of historical documents and interview people who remember to older days of the building?

It is a fortunate case when we are actually able to get historical records related to a building being restored. In the case of Yachiyozu we were lucky that there was one old photograph from the time when the building was originally built and it was also helpful that local historians and other people had found and interpreted written records about the Yachiyozu.

The survey of the physical evidence found in the dismantling eventually gives us a history of the building. Then, based on this history we begin discussions about what period in the building's history we should return it to. The basic rule is to return it to the original, but we also think not only about each building's individual story and what point in its history was its brightest period, the height of its glory, but also about its positioning in terms of Japanese history. From the survey of its physical construction evidence, we knew that in the building's 90-year history up until the restoration project began in 1996, changes had been made to the Yachiyozu 19 times.

These changes can be divided into four main periods. The first is the period of the original building which was similar in style to Edo-period playhouses. The second period was after the expansion of the building in the Taisho Period (in 1926). This expansion was conducted to accommodate a new fire law requiring smoking rooms on

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each floor of a building in accordance with the floor's seating capacity. At that time, two extensions were added to the second floor of the Yachiyozza on the right and left sides of the building as smoking rooms and they were covered with what is called a Yamagata Chidori gable. This made the building look much more extravagant as the "mountain" of the big main roof was now visually sitting atop the ridges of the two side roofs. That also happened to be the period during which the playhouse was at the peak of its glory, so in the case of the Yachiyozza it was decided to restore the building to that Taisho-period form.

Restoration is a process that looks back to the past, but at the same time it is also a job that looks to the future. When you do restoration work, how far into the future are you planning?

At least 100 years. For a building with big pillars and beams like a temple, the need for major repairs comes around about every 200 years. In the case of a residence or playhouse with their thinner pillars and beams, that need comes around every 100 years or so. So, my responsibility at the very minimum is to make sure the building last until that next repair time. When restoring a building I always try to do the best job possible, but human beings always make mistakes. In the future, as specialists study our restorations made now in the Heisei Period, they are sure to find any number of areas where we made mistakes in our judgment. That is why we leave records of the judgments we made in the restoration and their reasons to leave for future reference. On the parts we replace, we brand the wood with a mark that shows when the piece was replaced in some discrete place on the piece. And with the pieces we have taken out, even if they have been eaten beyond use by termites, we coat it in insecticide and keep it for future reference when the next restoration survey is made if it is a piece that provides important evidence of the building's history. If you store these pieces somewhere separate from the building, however, they will eventually be lost. So, we store them up in the building's attic.

Recording the things that we learned during the restoration survey work is an important part of our job, but we don't use a digital camera to record things, because there is no CD that will be good 100 years from now. If you store the information on the hard disc of a computer, the software will inevitably be different when the time comes to refer to it and it won't be possible to open it. The more primitive the preservation method the better it is. The glass dry-plate photographs taken 140 years ago at the end of the Edo period are still as clear as ever. And if you write something on handmade Japanese paper with *sumi* ink and put it in a paulownia box, it can keep for 1,000 years.

In the Yachiyozza restoration, when you replaced some of the floorboards that were in bad condition, you installed the new boards so they stuck up just a bit higher than the old boards. I hear that this was deliberate, so that as the boards shrunk in several years time they would be on the same level as the other boards and the floor would be flat again. I also heard that the color of the lacquer and the wall plaster when it is applied in the restoration is not the final intended color but a color calculated to reach the final desired color several years of aging.

In that sense, our calculations in restoration work are based on what state we want the building to be in after five to ten years of maturing. The railings in Yachiyozza are

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a beautiful red lacquer, but lacquer is a material that gradually becomes brighter in color after several years of oxidation through exposure to the air. If we were to finish them in a bright red from the beginning, it would become an unpleasing, ostentatious red after five or six years. In the case of floor boarding as well, if you replace just one board, it will stand out as overly white compared to the rest of the weathered ones. In such a case we use a technique called weathered color finish to make it match the other older boards better. What we do to get that one board to match the color of the boards that have been polished by the feet of people walking on it for 90 years? Today's paints deteriorate with time, so what we ended up doing was just to rub in a thin gray coating of *sumi* ink and then put on a layer of persimmon tannin. If it is walked on for 10 years, the oil from people's feet will permeate the wood and I believe that will make it the same color as the surrounding floor boards.

So, if we walk around on the floors of the Yachiyozza, the oil from our feet will be helping the building mature? That is a nice thought. We will be participating in the maturation of a building that has been around for 100 years.

That's right. I'm making use of the audience and the actors to get the color I want (laughs). Buildings mature and change with age. A ferroconcrete building only deteriorates over time, but wood matures and gets better with age.

For the restoration, an external "false roof" was first constructed over the entire building. Since Yachiyozza is a tourist attraction in the hot spring spa resort town of Yamaga, there must have been a lot of requests from the local town concerning the restoration project and how it was carried out.

There was a very strong request that we not make Yachiyozza a museum piece but make it a functioning theater that could continue to be used commercially. When the Kanamaruza was restored in the early 1970s as an Important Cultural Asset, no one was thinking of using it as a playhouse, much less for commercial productions with a full audience. So, we added four steel pillars in the audience seating area as an anti-earthquake measure. But then, Kabuki actor Kichimon Nakamura and Tojuro Sawamura said they wanted to perform there. That led to the three-day "Konpira Kabuki" performances in 1985.

Those performances were very popular and each year the number of performance days grew. The success of Konpira Kabuki had a big effect, prompting efforts to revive run-down old playhouses all around the country. It resulted in a succession of citizen movements to preserve and revive these buildings.

The approach gradually shifted from one of simply preserving cultural assets to include the importance of actually using these buildings. With the Yachiyozza we added strengthening members to the structure such as support pillars, increased the anti-earthquake strength of the walls and floors and other measures to increase the safety of the building. In addition, since old playhouses had no modern lighting or sound systems whatsoever, we took measures to run necessary cables under the flooring or through attic where they would not be seen in order to enable operation as a modern theater facility. We also added fire alarm and emergency exit lighting systems.

In using buildings like these, I believe there are two aspects to consider. One is "convenience and enjoyment" and the other is "safety." Safety is something that is

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absolutely necessary, but when we consider what convenience involves, it brings up a number of possibilities. For example, even though some things might appear inconvenient by today's standards, getting people to experience the way these theaters were used in the past by the actors and by the audience can be important, because it helps people understand what the enjoyment of theater was like in the old days. I believe that is the real way to enjoy an old playhouse. As I was working on the restoration, I was imagining the older people would enjoy the nostalgia of sitting in the tatami *masu-seki* of the ground floor seating area and younger people would choose to sit on the chairs in the surrounding semi-balcony sections. But, when the theater actually opened, it turned out that young people were enjoying the option of sitting in the *masu-seki*. The old ways have a special appeal for contemporary people.

**During the Yachiyozza restoration you opened the construction site to the public. Can this be seen as a way of putting cultural assets to use?**

The town of Yamaga is a tourist town, and as soon as the project started we were told that Yachiyozza was the symbol of the town and if it were closed for three years the town would lose its tourist draw. So, the town asked us to shorten the construction period. Because of the size of the building, I knew that the construction period might be lengthened but it couldn't be shortened. The town couldn't understand why all that time and money had to be spent on restoring a cultural asset. So we put our heads together with the cultural asset department of the city office to come up with a strategy. We told the city that if we made the restoration work itself an attraction it would be possible keep the tourists coming throughout the construction period and the tourist industry wouldn't suffer. We built an observation gallery inside the false roof facility and conducted tours for the citizens eight times a year, and 35 times in all during the project. Every time I spent half the night drawing up a resume for the presentations to explain the work going on, and in all a couple thousand people listened to the presentations, even though they were rather technical in nature.

Many tourists came through the observation gallery every day to see the restoration work, and for the almost four years it took to finish the project the average number of tourists visiting the town remained the same as before the start of the project. And, the people who watched the work would say that they would come back again to see the theater when the restoration was complete. In fact, we had a lot of repeat visitors.

**Besides these national Important Cultural Asset buildings, movements to preserve and use old playhouses are continuing around the country.**

I don't think there will be any more "A class" playhouses like the Yachiyozza and Kanamaruza. The large playhouse in Nanao in Ishikawa prefecture no longer has its facade and the exterior looks just like a warehouse but there are local people working very hard to preserve it. The Awazu Enbujo theater in Komatsu city in Ishikawa Prefecture that was being used as an inn was just about to be torn down when a passionate group of individuals got together to save it.

In effect, movements to preserve old playhouses are a form of local community development. So, it is natural that it be undertaken mainly by community groups. I, as an outsider, am glad to participate if I can provide some theoretical support for these local groups that are leading the movements. It is only people with specialized training like myself who can envision how some restoration can make a building that looks

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so run-down now become an attractive playhouse once again. I can draw a sketch for them of how appealing it can become with restoration based on the clues left in the building structure. And, we know it is possible that a single playhouse can provide an impetus for community development.

### What is it about old playhouses that has attracted you to them so much?

The appeal of the people surrounding these playhouses is a big part of it. I am attracted to their passion for protect these places that tell the history of their towns.

Another thing is their appeal as places for watching theater. In these playhouses, the stage and the audience are very close, so the vitality and emotions of the actors is communicated to the audience so well. Looking from the stage, the audience appears to be packed close together and I feel that atmosphere helps to melt the distance between the actors and audience and brings them together in spirit.

When I was asked to head a project to remove the four steel pillars that were added to the Kanamaruza audience seating area as an anti-earthquake measure, I made an unexpected discovery. As I was surveying the building to find a way to support the roof without the steel pillars, I did a review of the rafters under the roof. I found that the trellis-like scaffolding that remained over the stage actually extended way out over the audience seating area as well. It was structured so that the stagehands could climb out over the audience and drop a shower of cherry blossom petals over the entire seating area. Since the scaffolding was actually a gridiron structured of bamboo lashed with straw-woven ropes, giving it a kick could extend it out, and with a winch and pulley attached above, an actor who had gone out into the audience could be pulled up with a rope lowered down to him from above. In other words, the Edo-period playhouse was designed as a space where the actors and audience could come together as one. In Kanamaruza we were able to restore that trellis scaffolding and use it to hide the steel girders used to strengthen the roof structure and thus preserve the original appearance (of the Edo-period interior). Once you have an opportunity to see a play performed in that kind of playhouse, you will surely experience a different kind of “theater” from what you see in a large modern theater.