



Baby-Q "ALARM !"
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An Overview 解説

The Most Recent Trends in Contemporary Dance

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2004.12.6

コンテンポラリーダンスブームを解く
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The Rise of Contemporary Dance as a Departure from Butoh.

Japan's dance scene (aside from traditional classical dance and folk dance) can be classified into four categories: classical ballet, modern dance, Butoh, which has been extremely well received overseas and which was founded in 1959 by Tatsumi Hijikata; and contemporary dance, in which individual artists depart from existing methods and traditions and pursue original physical expression.

The Butoh scene is still dominated by its first generation of dancers. For example, Kazuo Ono, the world's oldest Butoh dancer at the age of 97, continues performing, even though he is confined to a wheelchair. Ushio Amagatsu's company, Sankaijuku, pre-miers a new work at the "Theatre de la Ville", Paris every two years and tours in the world. Dairakudakan celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in 2002. Akira Kasai is still active not only as an improvisational dancer but also as a choreographer.

The second generation includes Min Tanaka, who directs the genre-breaking Dance Hakushu in Yamanashi prefecture. Among the dancers active on an individual basis is Setsuko Yamada (currently associate professor at Kyoto University of Art and Design), who founded dance company Biwakei in 1989 and who has trained many young dancers. And the Butoh dancer Ko Murobushi is also highly regarded. Yet even though these dancers are prominent in the dance world, the genre of Butoh as a whole is no longer giving rise to a succession of new talent. Instead, we see contemporary dance arising to take the place of Butoh. Contemporary dancers take the possibilities for physical expression cultivated by Butoh and develop them in new ways. For example, Saburo Teshigawara, a post-Butoh talent who has attracted a great deal attention, was awarded the Bagnolet International Choreography Prize in 1986. His success in Europe brought contemporary dance to people's attention.

In addition, the appreciation of the yen during the bubble economy beginning in the mid 1980s brought increased opportunities to engage performing artists, which previously had been difficult due to the expense. At that time, Nouvelle Danse was the leading trend in Europe, and Nouvelle Danse companies were highly touted in the media when they were brought to Japan along with operas and musicals. These performances in Japan by companies from overseas created an

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audience for contemporary dance for the first time and led to the current boom.

After the collapse of the bubble economy, public theaters, beginning with the Saitama Arts Theater and including the Kanagawa Kenmin Hall and Biwako Hall, took an active role in engaging famous foreign companies. They continued maintaining an environment in which the works of world-class artists such as Pina Bausch, William Forsythe, Jiri Kylian, and Philippe Decouflé could be seen.

The stimulus from the world's contemporary dance companies was one factor in developments during the 1990s. Kim Ito's company followed Teshigawara in winning the Best Newcomer Prize at the Bagnolet International Choreography Prize. The company known as H. Art Chaos won the Dance of the Year from the New York Times with its acrobatic performances imbued with a unique esthetic. Idevian Crew followed a creed based on freely conceived ideas and humor that go beyond the framework of dance. "Mizu to Abura" developed mime in new ways. The Condors achieved great success with their entertaining acts of dance and storytelling performed by an all-male troupe dressed in school uniforms. These and other companies came into being with theatrically exciting performances.

Moving into the 21st century, support from public funds and private corporations was a factor in the simultaneous establishment of several festivals and prizes, which encouraged the debuts of a new generation of artists born in the 1960s and 1970s. Many individual styles competed for attention, and the situation was comparable to the proliferation of dramatic performances in small-theater during the 1980s.

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The Birth of Dance Spots

A factor in the emergence of the new generation of young artists was the existence of artistic spaces that discovered and trained new talent for contemporary dance. Initially during the 1980s, aside from Tatsumi Hijikata's Asbestos Studio, a rehearsal space and performance hall managed by Butoh groups; and Dairakudakan's Toyotama Garan, the only venue producing dance performances was Jean Jean, a small theater in Tokyo's Shibuya area. Subsequently, a number of private companies decided to improve their public images by supporting the arts, so they opened performance halls where contemporary dance was performed, including Spiral Hall and Park Tower Hall.

In the second half of the 1990s, new vacant spaces appeared in the urban buildings abandoned during the recession and were transformed into artists' spaces, and the epicenter of the current movement was in the many "dance spots" that were established during that period. Session House put on many unique productions, such as a festival made up of ten-minute short works, or a presentation at which the audience decided the admission price after seeing the performances. The space known as Die Pratz produced the Dance Festival "Dance ga Mitai," in which the featured dancers and program changed daily. ST Spot in Yokohama was administered by volunteers and had a perceptive dancer as its curator. Located in a small municipally supported theater, it became a base of operations for budding dancers, with support for everything from auditions of new dancers to creation of new works. Osaka's Art Theater dB was administered by a non-profit organization, Dance Box and became a gateway to success, as well as a base for contemporary dancers in the Osaka area. In all these cases, producers knowledgeable about dance were in charge, and they cooperated with one another in training young artists.

In addition, public theaters such as Itami AI Hall, Setagaya Public Theatre, and Yokohama Red Brick Warehouse came to the fore as venues for dance. By producing their own projects and providing continuous financing, they have become a major factor in supporting the dance scene.

Private Support and the Activities of the New Generation of Producers.

Private corporations began supporting the arts as a part of their social contribution programs in the 1990s. Among the companies that actively supported contemporary dance, including creative works of unproven value, were Asahi Breweries, Kirin Brewery Co., Ltd., Toyota Motor Corporation, and the Saison Foundation. Toyota in particular joined

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with the Setagaya Public Theatre in 2001 to establish the Toyota Choreography Award (chosen by a committee chaired by Ushio Amagatsu) with the objective of discovering the next generation of choreographers. After only two rounds of awards, it has become known as a prize that opens doors for new choreographers.

Another element supporting the vitality of contemporary dance is the activities of a new generation of producers. In contrast to producers in Butoh, who doubled as company leaders and worked with only one company, these producers work independent from dance companies and found their own production companies. They have changed the system in significant ways by receiving private and public support for mounting a variety of productions at festivals and other project.

In addition, non-profit organizations in Japan have just begun to play a groundbreaking role in this area. For example, the Japan Contemporary Dance Network (JCDN), a non-profit organization founded in 2001, works cooperatively on disseminating information and selling tickets, sending performers out to perform on demand, conducting workshops, and otherwise trying to provide an environment for dance performances and to increase the popularity of dance among the general public. Many artists also participate in the activities of the non-profit organization Artists and Children, which sends dancers to perform in elementary and junior high schools.

With the arrival of this new generation, artists, who once disliked forming interdisciplinary ties, have begun to think seriously about their role in society, which marks a major shift in their consciousness. They also have a strong desire to perform overseas, actively seeking to participate in artistic showcases. In an increasing number of cases, they make their overseas debut before having established a reputation in Japan. We have no way of knowing the extent of the creative potential of the new generation of artists, but we hope that this expanded outlook leads to unprecedented advances in the art of dance.