

Early Dance Festival in October. The new venue worked very well and we enjoyed having time to work and relax together. The success was measured in Tadcaster when the audience showed great appreciation for Pastime's performance.

## *Renaissance Dance in Japan*

### *"Katharina" with the story "Luther" played by Gidayu*

by Nobuko Yuasa

How can it be possible, to stage Renaissance dance with Japanese traditional music? I tried it once in 2014. The dances were performed on a story of an old Japanese tale, costumed with kimono, accompanied with lute & dulcimer, and narrated with Biwa (an instrument with the same origin as the lute) and song. (The report is in Early Dance Circular, no.96, May 2014). The aim was to explore the combination of Japanese music and western arts.

However, in this case, both the process of making the plan and the goal were not simple. In fact, the promoter Kansai Drama Festival and the chairman Prof. Kasaya requested a combined work of Western and Japanese music and dance, and the receiver Prof. Uemura proposed a drama on Luther and his wife Katharina, as this year is the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. On the way to book a church, they came across a Gidayu player, Rodayu Toyotake who belongs to the Osaka Lutheran Church.

The plan started slowly but as soon as the performance date was set, I started to make dance scenes of Katharina. It took time to find good tunes to fit to the image of each scene, to choreograph, to practise, and to make costumes and stage props. Now I smile with remembering that at the time I kept pushing Prof. Uemura, "We don't have much time!!" I made out the dances in the first place without waiting for the scenario to be made.

Katharina von Bora born in 1499, was brought to a convent, became a nun, being inspired with the reform movement, fled with the other nuns, and later married Luther. She was a strong and hard working woman whom Luther called "The boss of Zalsdorf (their farm)", and also "My true love". The request for making a dance on her life had already reached me soon after the show in 2014. It was good chance to think on her and women's life in the time. I gave a short article on her life, Luther and music, and on the chosen songs and choreographed dances for the show.

On 29<sup>th</sup> October, two days before The Memorial, the show started with a puppet play of Joruri. It was a short version of "Gospel in Bunraku", the story of

Jesus, composed by Rodayu. The black high panels were set up to cover the wall behind the altar in the church. All the items for service were moved behind the black panel wings. The story was narrated by Rodayu accompanied by a shamisen, a three-stringed instrument, by the player Dango Takezawa, and performed with three puppets of Jesus, Mary and Peter. The puppets were costumed in kimono, manipulated by five professionals all in black, which showed the puppets coming to life. The black back drop was ideal. At the end, on the scene of the Hill of Golgotha, the centre panels were slid into the wings to show the church cross as the stage set of the crucifixion.

After a short break, Rodayu with Dango started to narrate Luther's life. Joruri is called Gidayu as well and when it accompanies a puppet play it's called Puppet Joruri, or Bunraku. A tayu is the singer & narrator, who leads the drama and acts as characters in the story. The traditional theme of Gidayu is love and loyalty. The origin is in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and the style was confirmed about the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The script writer Prof. Katayama converted the Luther story, which Prof. Uemura wrote, to start in a typical Japanese setting of parents' love and to finish on the famous scene of a thunderstorm, when Luther made a vow to be a monk. Rodayu narrated and acted as Luther, his father and mother, powerfully, quietly, furiously, resolutely, ....accompanied with Dango. The audience was completely involved in it.

After a modern style short narration by Prof. Uemura, we moved to the act of Katharina and her life in the convent with renaissance dances. I chose two songs by Guillaume Dufay. As they are the earlier period music of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, I liked them to represent the conventional faith. The first tune was the song of farewell "Adieu ces bons vins", and the second was a song on good things, "Bon jour, bon mois". Choreographing the beautiful two songs, both in triple time and with **irregular bars**, inspired me to get ideas. The first song fitted very well to **bassedance** or **Bassadanza** and the second did as well while requiring **Saltarello** step.

Costumed as nuns, Yuri Wake and I stepped on the centre aisle to the stage taking a sheer cloth each, and I also held a lighted lantern. As the stage was flat, for the audience on the back rows, I used the aisle as a part of the dance space. It reminded me of the traditional Japanese theatre which has a bridge or path structure.



*Yuri Wake and Nobuko costumed  
as nuns*



"Hashigakari" or "Hanamichi", to a stage. I think the structure progressed with Japanese typical theatre work style of using the long entrance/exit as the part of a drama and/or let audience enjoy to watch the performance closer.

Later there was a comment presented by a writer Prof. Morita in which she understood my tricks and wrote "The cloth seemed to represent the commandment and Katharina's silent life, which she put on her arms significantly in the first dance". My cloth was passed to Yuri and I revealed the lantern held high. After the cloister bell rang as the bridge to the second song, we danced representing a conflict of two personalities. Prof. Morita continued "and then it turned to be a symbol to restore her from stepping beyond the border of commandment. However, the small but clear light of the lantern kept representing her firm will".

Rodayu and Dango, who kept sitting on their small but high stage diagonally set on the right side, narrated on Luther's life from the time he was a monk to his own reformation.

Then Mamiko Hirai, soprano and lutenist Kenji Sano came on the stage again from the left wing. Luther himself learnt music and dance during his early student university days, and played lute well and sang in good voice. We dancers, costumed as Katharina and Luther, stepped on the aisle. Two songs for the act were by their contemporary composer Ludwig Senfl, who was Luther's friend. Those tunes are jolly, written in clear duple time, and fit to steps in Quaternaria and Piva rhythm. The first song entitled, "Dort oben auf dem Berge", and continued, "I'll marry the girl who comes out from the lodge last". It overlaps their marriage as Katharine was the last one among the escaped nuns in the refuge. After the first dance, we left the stage and modern narration was inserted.

To come up for the second dance, we changed the prop from bunches of green ears, which was the

symbol of their new life, to a basket with autumn plants as the symbol of completion.



Bunches of green ears, which was the symbol of their new life

The second song was, "Will niemand singen", which means "If no one sings, I'll sing". The choreography has lots of turns and passing the basket. Finally we held the basket from both sides and slowly took out a bible (prop) with the psalm, which Luther composed, "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott" a capella. The bible was held high to show all people from left to right. Then the psalm

was repeated in Japanese text accompanied with lute rhythmically, and we walked out along the aisle firmly holding the bible high.

Dango played the psalm melody once, and then Rodayu read the text with the Gidayu style. We dancers came back on the aisle with a changed costume of angels and danced to the Gidayu shamisen. The most difficult thing for choreographing was finding the bars and down beats from the recording. After many trials it came up and I put steps starting with almain step transforming to hopped and jumped steps. They were perfectly suited to the music which Rodayu loved to watch. While dancing, I plucked a small harp, which I had bought in the UK just before the show, tuned in a Japanese scale. This final act represented the concept of eternity and the higher celestial world not of this earth to conclude the show.

Back on this planet, a typhoon was running from south to north which made the train times irregular, but many in the audience took the risk to come from afar. When the first show finished, the storm was exhausted and the sun came out. The second show was accomplished in front of another enthusiastic full house audience who stood up to applaud at the end. Many people told me later, that they couldn't imagine what the show would be like, and were amazed as it was nothing like patched work, but the transfer to each act was natural and all the pieces were indispensable from each other. We got many requests for staging the show again. There were key factors to get the show successfully accepted by the audience. Besides the basic idea and arrangement by Prof. Uemura, I appreciate all the performers for their highly professional work and the warm welcome by the church pastor Oshiba and the congregation members.

Soon after the show I visited Luther's town Wittenberg to see where they made and left marks, and to finish my travel with Katharina for a few years. Here below is the Lutheran Schlosskirche - after a woodcut by Lucas Crannach the elder - 1509.

