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Thanks to all those who provided illustrations, particularly Beate Müller whose pictures are identified with a star. ★

Renaissance Dance in a Japanese setting , including kimono

by Nobuko Yuasa

After ten marvellous months in the UK, I left Cambridge in March 2014,
to prepare for a show in Japan seven days later.

The show was presented by the International Research Centre for Japanese Studies in Kyoto. A coordinator Nobuya Monta, also a composer, proposed a project to me two years ago involving a staged production on an old Japanese tale combining Western court dance with Japanese music. I accepted this offer as it presented a chance to realise a long standing idea of mine taking advantage of the coincidences between early Renaissance dance and Japanese traditional dances such as the use of a flat foot with a soft knee movement, giving a steady and smooth quality.

I was also interested in the costume aspect. Before Western costume started to change shape and expand horizontally, it generally had a vertical flowing line, arising from a one piece garment, tied with a belt and often with long sleeves. Traditional Japanese kimono has kept the style of wrapping and tying a single piece of material with a sash. I imagined it was going to be an interesting trial of my ideas, particularly in view of the differences between Western and Japanese culture recognized as traditional.

We decided to use the well-known 14th century tale of Anju and Zushio and Nobuya already had the idea to invite the “biwa” player, Silvain Guignard, who is unexpectedly a Swiss national and former piano music researcher. I invited my regular accompanist to play lute which, as it derives from the same instrument as the biwa, the middle eastern “oud”, would allow each to show their different developmental paths besides their similarities. Later I met a dulcimer player in Tokyo when she played for my dance. The dulcimer is in a globally spread family of string instruments including harpsichord and Japanese “koto”. With this selection of appropriate instruments and, most importantly as dancers know, good players, the project started firmly.

Before coming to the UK in 2013, I had choreographed six dances and rehearsed with two dancers every week for four months. I divided the script, which is composed, sung and played by the biwa player, into three parts, putting dances at the end of each part to illustrate the story. I chose two basse dances, a ballo, and an estampie.

Perhaps the most difficult part was the transition between the dance and the biwa music. Biwa music is typically Japanese with totally different ideas of scale and rhythm from Western music, and mostly played to accompany the song or recitative by the player himself. Our musicians created various overlapping sections

picking up parts from the dance melodies. They did this very well, drawing on their inter-cultural knowledge and experience.

At the end of the drama, we added a finale using music composed by Nobuya. This was a totally modern creation holding the image of the story. I choreographed two tunes in a renaissance dance style giving new steps according to the rhythm and melody. The music has many hemiolas, irregular beats and also a fugue effect. I really enjoyed this as the music provided good ideas for creating the steps and figures. I designed and made costumes for this final purely dance section which contrasted with those of the preceding drama which I designed in traditional kimono style.

The performance was an annual production at the institute, aiming to examine the potential of current and future Japanese stage arts especially in combination with Western culture and art. As it's a popular event with many in the audience returning every year, the 500 seats were quickly booked up. Before the show, we each explained the instrument, the music and our creative processes. For my part, I also explained the background of early renaissance dance including its rhythmical and musical charm, neither of which is known in Japan. I believe it was the audience's first experience of the style of early renaissance dance.

You can see the dance performance on the centre website with the title: “Anju and Zushio by Renaissance Dance and Chikuzen-Biwa” at <http://blskweb.nichibun.ac.jp/lapis/locale.do?locale=en> or you can see it on my website <http://emclute.com/yuasa/history/index.html>

Summary of the story:

Part 1: Anju and her younger brother Zushio travel with their mother to the capital Kyoto to obtain the emperor's pardon for their father who was wrongly exiled. On the way, they are tricked, separated into two boats and sent to different lands as slaves.

Part 2: Several years later Anju convinces Zushio to escape and helps him.


Part 3: Zushio recovers his father's honour and inherits the estate. He finds his mother, blind on an island and her sight is restored.

Being on the stage as Anju, I couldn't see the production from the audience's side. Watching the video later, I was happy as the movement and the costumes accord very well, the biwa and dance parts make a

harmony, chase each other and progress the story together.

The promoter, Kazuhiko Kasaya, a researcher of Japanese culture, complimented us as it well exceeded his expectations. He also gave me some practical examples that he recognised of similarities between the movements in our dance and "noh", Japanese traditional court dance established around the 13th to 14th centuries. The project achieved its goal, even though it was planned as a trial show. I hope to have the opportunity to repeat it to refine and mature the production and offer people the experience of both cultures and music whilst creating something modern and new. (see photos on p 12)

Nobuko Yuasa



Maypole dancing in Edinburgh ...

May seem a slightly strange event but there are considerable traditions for this ancient form of dance in many European countries apart from England. So it was not entirely surprising to receive a request from the Edinburgh Rudolf Steiner School to go and teach the staff a maypole dance for them to perform on May Day. Austria, home of the school's eponymous inspiration, is one of those countries.

I taught Folk dancing there once a week for fifteen years, so it was a great pleasure to return and meet some of my erstwhile colleagues even though the gap of seven years since retirement meant that many whom I knew had retired. Nevertheless, when I got there and found my twelve "volunteers" it was delightful to find that three of them had taken part in the previous venture for the School's sixtieth birthday celebration fifteen years before. Yes, this time around we were to celebrate the School's seventy fifth birthday.

The pole had been borrowed from a local christian community and turned out to be a cut down flagstaff about twelve feet in height. Nick Brett, old friend on the staff who had been the depute who had rung me to ask if I would come, was about to fix the ribbons around a screwdriver stuck into the top of the pole which he had already sunk into the front lawn.

I had decided on a simple plait, so with a dozen brave staff in six pairs we started. "Face your partner - no, don't pick up the ribbons yet. Now take right hands with your partner and pull past to meet another dancer; yes, it's a good idea to let go of the first one! Left hand to the next and so on round till you meet your partner for the second time. Now you may pick up the ribbons and stand facing partner again. Now do exactly the same but holding the ribbons and don't try taking hands. Ribbons held in the outside hand, with the other hand to take up

the slack and try not to behead each other as you pass"..... and so on.

Nick had bought great lengths of really nice braid in six bright colours, so the plait was very jolly looking. They were a very good set of pupils, and the only real trouble I had was in getting them to hold the end of their ribbon in the outside hand and not have two or three feet dangling as they went round. Impressively they skipped all the way, and because we had plenty of ribbon length they did five circuits, which made a very good plait.

Came the day and an anguished 'phone call from the school about the weather, and a decision to postpone till May 2nd, which, as the gods watch over these things, was the ACTUAL birthday of the school, so equally appropriate.

The next day, the sun shone and the entire school turned out to watch, standing grouped in their classes all round the lawn, the staff marched on in pairs (to Prince William). Six girls from class nine who were standing round the pole, came forward to hand the ribbons to the dancers and they were off. All went very well and the plait looked good when done. Then came the "unwind", in the course of which things went wrong and they came to a halt. I played on, and they got themselves sorted out and the ribbons came out to straight from the screwdriver once more. There had, needless to say, never been a fankle in either of the practice sessions, but I hope that teaching material will be made of their ability to sort out the problem for themselves and carry on!

I had asked if there was a competent photographer among class nine pupils and a boy was sent for who took my camera and proceeded to take sixty (yes!) shots during the dance, and then thanked me very courteously as he handed the camera back for "giving him the chance to use it". He has a vastly more sophisticated one of his own at home I discovered.

All in all, a delightful occasion and well worthy of the anniversary it marked. (see picture P. 12)

Nicolas Broadbridge

THE EDC ANNUAL LECTURE

on

Friday 20th February 2015

at

The Artworkers' Guild, 6 Queen Square,
London, WC1N3AT

by

Professor Ulinka Rublack

(details to follow in the next issue and on the website)