

Amateur theatre in Toyama, Japan

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In 1945, when World War II was brought to an end, Japan was utterly ruined, most of her cities were bombed and burned down and people were depressed, baffled in a whirlwind of confusion.

Though they were suffering from severe shortages of food and necessities, people who were at last emancipated from the shackles of despotic militarism, who at last regained freedom of expression, sought their ideal in culture and art, and they took up various kinds of artistic activities. Amateur theatre was one of them.

But theatre, as a co-operative activity in which participants do their best to show human

situations directly through their physical actions, was at that time in a peculiarly difficult position. They could not find facilities to give their performances in, yet across the whole country there were established many amateur theatrical groups—Citizens Theatre, Workers Theatre, Youth Theatre, Students Theatre and so on—their theatrical activities spread all through the country like wild fires in the field. But, in ten years or so, most of those groups collapsed and disappeared, some through the difference of ideologies among the members, some through financial problems, and some through their dramatic incompetence and lack of creative initiative.

The modern dramatic movement in Japan, it may be said, began in 1909 when European modern drama was adopted. The dramatic movement in Japan had

in its not so long history many sad experiences; for instance, just before World War II, many capable, leading persons were persecuted and put in prison because of censorship; the control of thought and belief.

It was not so long ago that there were few professional actors who could earn their own living only by their stage performances. It is doubtful if there were any amateur theatrical persons who believed in the possibility that amateur theatre would take deep root in the everyday life of the citizens before the end of this century.

Lately, on account of economic prosperity, people could

afford to find increasingly more time to enjoy life itself, with the large 'transvaluation' of 'more mind, less matter.' Such a situation has brought a gradual change in the world of amateur theatre in Japan.

Nippon Amateur Theatre Association (NADA), whose president is Mr. Chiyomi Hara, a noted Ibsenist in Japan, is the core of all Japan amateur theatrical groups. NADA was established in 1961 with the advice and help of the Agency for Cultural Affairs and now comprises forty-six member groups, ninety-six individual members, fourteen special members; in total 156. The NADA office is now in Toyama (7-1 Funabashi-kitamachi, Toyama City, Toyama, Japan 930).

Most of the member groups have given performances of various kinds of plays—the works of Japanese professional playwrights, modern plays by European and American writers, such as absurd dramas and epic dramas, as well as those written by the leaders of the member groups. The artistic quality and value of their performances are, of course, not the same, but all these amateur groups have continued to keep up a steady effort of production, though sometimes unnoticed, and their steady effort may be compared to the flowers that wait under heavy snow for the coming of the spring. These activities seem to have taken root deep in their respective native tongues and are about to bear fruit.

Toyama Prefecture is situated in the central part of Japan and faces the Sea of Japan. Regarding the population of 1,120,000,

Toyama stands the 38th among the forty-seven prefectures of Japan, yet regarding its level of living condition and the so-called 'amenities,' Toyama ranks first or at least second.

Toyama is reputed to have been very energetically devoted to international cultural exchange, especially in the field of international theatrical activities: a professional group, SCOT, lead by Mr. Tadashi Suzuki, in Toga and an amateur theatrical group, Bungeiza, represented by Mr. Hiroshi Koizumi, in Toyama City has a history of more than forty-five years.

In 1983, in commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary

of Toyama Prefecture, the Toyama International Amateur Theatre Festival (TIATF) was organized and succeeded in inviting fifteen groups from twelve countries of the world, whose success brought the commendation that Toyama "put away the barrier of Amateur Theatre isolationism in Japan." In 1985, as a special event for the Year of the Youth, the second TIATF was planned and carried out: fourteen high-school students groups from eleven countries (of the USA, Europe, Oceania and Asia), and amateur theatrical leaders representing eighteen countries, participated. The 3rd TIATF was held in 1989 and twenty-seven groups from twenty-four countries and theatrical leaders from thirty-one countries joined in this event. In 1992, Toyama International Amateur

Theatre Festival (TIATF '92) was held as one of the first Japan Expo Toyama '92. Twenty-five groups from twenty-four countries and theatrical leaders from thirty-four countries participated in it. It may well be noted that these festivals have been organized and managed by a joint committee of the local administrative offices, mass media, cultural groups and citizens of Toyama Prefecture, where Bungeiza has taken the 'so called' subordinate works which are pillars and props and which are unseen but necessary to support the efficient management of the great event.

Much of the success of those festivals are to be attributed to the leadership of Mr. Yutaka Nakaoki, Honorary President of TIATF and the Governor of Toyama Prefecture. He is a brilliant intellectual and highly supportive of these TIATFs.

I firmly believe that there is no other prefectural governor in Japan who has given and will give such generous support to international cultural exchange programmes.

Besides, Mr. Atsushi Hirata, Prof. Emeritus of Toyama University and the Vice-president of Toyama Prefectural Artistic and Cultural Association, has positively supported us from the very first until today. And it is inestimable how helpful and contributive he has been to the success of international theatre festivals and many other international exchanging projects.

The Theatrical Group Bungeiza has activated its own dramatic activities to promote and stimulate the local artistic situation,

and also striven to hold the production of the high-school theatre and the theatre of the handicapped and to further their international exchange. Not only theatrical exchange, but also other fields of art—dance, music, arts, and floral art—have received the chance of participating in international activities through the mediation of Bungeiza. Thus Bungeiza has helped to bring fruitful results of international friendship and mutual understanding.

In the summer of 1991, the first Inami International Wooden Sculpture Camp was held in Inami Town of Toyama Prefecture, and wooden sculptors of five continents participated in it. More than half of

the participating sculptors joined through the mediation of Bungeiza. This is one of the examples how the communication ties of international theatre exchange have been spread to the other fields also and have largely contributed to the success of other projects.

In 1985, the Asian Regional Centre of International Amateur Theatre Association (IATA) was established in Toyama, and in 1991, the office of both All Nippon Amateur Theatre Council and Nippon Amateur Dramatic Association has moved to Toyama from Tokyo. Since then, such international theatrical events as the 1993 International Amateur Theatre Summit in Japan, the 1994 Asian Amateur Theatre Summit in Japan and Asian Festival of Theatre Films, have been held in Toyama, to say nothing of international theatre festivals. International amateur theatre activities in Japan have been,

therefore, developed actively, centering in Toyama.

From September 28 through October 7 1996, the International Theatre Festival and International Children's Theatre Festival will be held as part of the main events of the National Culture Festival, Toyama '96. It is also planned that the performances will be given not only on the stage of those theatres, but also on board a large ship on the pacific waves of Toyama Bay. Furthermore, it is decided that Toyama will host the 6th World Children's Theatre Festival in Toyama in the year of 2000. International Theatre exchange in Toyama are expected to become more and more active in the future.