



[Conversations on Theater](#)

Conversations on Theater with Naoko Maeshiba

Posted on [February 26, 2014](#) by [Peter Davis](#)

[Naoko Maeshiba](#) is a dancer, choreographer, and director. She was born in Kobe, Japan. Her work is sublime and beautiful. While it's not easy to describe her work, it's impossible to forget. She cares more for process than plot. She's about the question not the answer.

[Twilight Station \(at Theatre Project \)](#) opens QuestFest, a two-week, biennial international festival celebrating visual theatre. Naoko was commissioned to create a piece that features members from [Quest Visual Theatre's](#) Wings Company. Wings Company is an ensemble of deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing performers who receive training in visual theatre and educational methodology.

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Peter:

How did the idea for Twilight Station come together?

Naoko:

I went into the show with no preconceived ideas. I usually have a lot of ideas or some scenes already written. I discovered that I have three people to work with and create an hour show. It's not a talking show. It's not a play. So, I wanted it to be on the abstract side. I started thinking of all the combinations and the structure of things. Is it going to be solo, duets, trios? In that way, I thought, maybe, they're just all trapped in one place.

At the same time, I was thinking of this Japanese playwright slash director, Ōta Shōgo, who I worked with. He has this whole stations series. The Stations Series is a silent play with a water station, wind station, and earth station. These are all written, but the actors don't speak. It's done in silence. So, I started thinking about that. Then I thought, this is a station where people come and go, arriving, departing, a juncture in life. You think of any station; train or airport, or other and there's drama. I was interested in this point of life. A lot of things can happen at the station.

That was the station part. The twilight part is...I think I have always been interested in this idea of the ephemeral moment. Twilight is in between time. It's not day or evening. It's that very sensitive, very important moment right before evening. I was drawn to that idea.

In movies, there are twilight scenes, which is a scene where something subtle happens, or implications of something happening. But, actually, no big thing happens. Later on, it might have tickled some incident or have a ripple effect and much later something happens.

The movie director, Seijun Suzuki, has a lot twilight themes and I thought, wouldn't that be great if there's only some kind of inkling, a strong feeling that something could happen. But, actually, it doesn't have to happen.

So, that's where the twilight idea came out. With three people, I wanted it to be some kind of transformation, some kind of reveal, some kind of facing self. I thought the station format might be a good format to explore.





Peter:

What questions are you asking?

Naoko:

This has been such an interesting process for me. The questions I'm asking are not only thematic questions. It's about the process. It's about myself. It's about the larger picture. There are different layers of questions that I'd asked and one of them is the format of building this piece. My work doesn't usually have a plot or a typical character journey. There's some sort of journey, but it's not what you'd expect in a play.

We were more interested in looking at people through a different lens. In art there is portrait, landscape and still life. I had that in mind. And how are these ways of looking at things challenging our perception or understanding. That was the focus. That's part of the question.

Another question is; is this kind of format going to be valid as theater or as dance? I'm a bit nervous about this piece, maybe more than anything I've done in the past, because I didn't use any hiding device. Usually when I try to create illusory work, which most of my works tends to be, in order to create the magic I'm hiding things. On this piece I'm wondering is there magic if I don't hide things.

Peter:

Is there a moment where you knew your process, your gamble to approach it a certain way, was paying off?

Naoko:

I'm still trying to figure out what it is. I usually have a pretty good sense of timing and how to build rhythm and pace. This piece feels like it has its own time, or something. I'm having a hard time trying to form it. I don't know whether that is because of the content or what it is.





Peter:

As an artist, what are the obstacles for you working this new process and working with others?

Naoko:

The new thing was that I was challenged to start this piece with nothing, basically. And how we built the piece. Then my focus went to who each of these people really are. It was a learning process. I have my own style and aesthetics, towards work. Now my aesthetics and philosophy are meeting with these people's aesthetics and philosophy. It might be a merging thing. You might not see a classic Naoko Maeshiba world. You might see something different, a different side of me, tickled by these people. That was a new challenge, and how I work with that. How I can open myself to that possibility.

Peter:

You would be satisfied if the audience left thinking or feeling what?

Naoko:

I honestly would be happy if any one moment stayed with them for a long time. If they felt that they have experienced something real, even for one moment, that's all that matters.

It's not even something real, but if something substantial inside themselves resonates, if they can see or feel a moment differently. It's not a goal. But that's how I like to live myself, my life with more moments like that.

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Twilight Station is produced by Quest Visual Theatre. Tim McCarty is President/Artistic Director

Direction/Choreography/Scenography by Naoko Maeshiba
Performers: Roslyn Ward, Mervin Primeaux, and Francis Cabatac
Composer/Musician: Andy Hayleck

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Peter:

Tim, why Naoko?

Tim:

I respect her and her work. She certainly has something to say. I love her teaching as well. One of the big themes of [QuestFest](#), this year, is Nurture the New. This is not only a new piece but something new for Naoko as well. How do you create a piece within an inclusive ensemble, and how does that change how you think? This has been a challenge and a journey.



Peter:

What makes Naoko's approach to developing new work unique?

Andrew:

She puts a lot of importance on sound. And I get to work with the deaf community. It changes the way I compose and play music. It makes me more aware.

Mervin:

Naoko has a very different approach. She's a great teacher. I'm trying to learn a new style of dance and movement and theater and trying to incorporate that. Really digging deep into that. I'm like, what is Butoh? Learning more about the Japanese culture and that style has been really beneficial. This kind of work is important.



Roslyn:

This process has been challenging. It's forced me to stretch my imagination beyond what I'm used to. Working with visual theater I'm used to having a more concrete structure, to having a character, and developing that one character. With Naoko it's more of a process journey, which can be confusing if you allow yourself to get in the way of yourself. You have to be willing to jump outside of the box and forget what you've been taught. Flex and suspend your imagination. The show is all process. There may be a destination but if you don't get there it's OK, as long as you got something from the process.

Francis:

The process is its own beast. Because we don't know what the end looks like it comes alive differently everyday. Naoko's process is more expansive than anything I've ever done before.

Peter:

What's in it for the audience approaching it that way?

Roslyn:

The same thing—flex and suspend your imagination.

Francis:
Freedom.



ASL(American Sign Language) for Quest

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