



Creating Together

The Adventures of Tokyo Caravan



Photos by Kishin Shinoyama

By Minako Shigematsu

On the evenings of October 21 and 22, 2016, Tokyo Caravan was held on an outdoor stage in Roppongi, one of Tokyo's liveliest nightlife districts. It was enjoyed by many people and generated tremendous buzz. Tokyo Caravan is a movement that began in 2015, bringing together artists from various genres, including the theater, art, music, and traditional performing arts. Hideki Noda, one of modern Japan's leading theater directors and playwrights, formulated its key concept—that “culture is created where people come together.”

Tokyo Caravan was launched by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government to lead the cultural program of

the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. In August, Tokyo Caravan went to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during the Olympic and Paralympic Games. In September, it went to Japan's Tohoku region—Sendai in Miyagi Prefecture and Soma in Fukushima Prefecture—which is recovering from the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. It held workshops in various places to encourage a cultural “inter-mixture” with local artists and children through physical expression, such as live music, dance, and theater, transcending national boundaries, languages, cultures, and genres to search for and create new forms of expression.

Then, in October, Tokyo Caravan returned to its home base in Tokyo and wrote a new page in the story woven in Rio and Tohoku. On stage in

Roppongi, a musical was performed with a fable-like plot: “Can people digging a hole in search of forbidden freedom find a new world by escaping to the other side of the planet?” With dancers and musicians from Rio and traditional Japanese dancers from Tohoku joining noh actors and a ska band, this unprecedented performance, which played to a full house with standing room only, was enthusiastically received by the audience. Though language, culture, and customs may differ, by moving their bodies and sharing in the experience of creating something new, people can naturally accept diversity and get along with one another. This ideal was manifested in this festive stage performance—the fruit of the “story”—created by Tokyo Caravan in its workshops in Rio and in the Tohoku region.

As the Olympic Charter states: “Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life,” so the Olympic and Paralympic Games are not just festivals of sports; they are also festivals of culture. Tokyo Caravan will enliven the Tokyo 2020 Games through the power of culture and art. Between now and then, its “cultural circus” will visit towns around Japan, mixing with people and conveying the fun of live performances, to create a story that goes beyond 2020.

Minako Shigematsu is a freelance writer specializing in classical music, art, and Japanese culture.