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December 1, 2020  
Tokyo Festival Executive Committee

## **Tokyo Festival 2020 comes to a close Realizing the digital shift without creating a society that stifles or silences is key to adapting performing arts to life alongside COVID-19**

On November 29, 2020, the Tokyo Festival Executive Committee brought to a close Tokyo Festival 2020, following the festival's 61-day run from September 30. This year's program featured a total of 39 performing arts events held with thorough measures taken to prevent transmission of COVID-19. In addition to performances held in person, events were broadcast online and conducted with assistance from VR technology. Inspired by the current societal challenge of meeting others while minimizing risk, "To Meet or Not To Meet?" was chosen for this year's theme. Through a wide range of event formats, the festival explored new approaches to performing arts with an eye to ensuring the future survival of the art form. With measures taken to ensure safety and peace of mind for visitors, events were held both in theaters and via digital platforms. The festival attracted a large number<sup>1</sup> of participants, with in-person events drawing in a total of about 29,000 visitors and spectators, while online performances achieved a reach of about 13,000<sup>2</sup>.

In the face of unprecedented circumstances that gave rise to serious questions about the festival's feasibility, the members of the Planning Team leveraged their respective areas of expertise to come together in a true show of unity. With the support of artists and staff, the festival served as a platform for exploring the possibilities and pushing the boundaries of performing arts, as well as a venue for a variety of new connections between both attendees and everyone otherwise involved with the festival. The organizers are deeply grateful for this opportunity to bring the festival a step forward into the future.

In addition to extending its gratitude to all this year's visitors, the Tokyo Festival Executive Committee reaffirms its commitment to continuing to be a part of Tokyo's appeal as a place open to people from all walks of life.

1: Figures in this release are preliminary estimates valid as of 11:59 p.m. on November 29, 2020.

2: The reach figure for online performances is the cumulative number of viewers, playbacks, and accesses to the site.

### **■ Comment from Tokyo Festival General Director Satoshi Miyagi**

#### **"To Meet or Not to Meet?" and Digital Transformation Satoshi Miyagi**

As I keenly watched the course of the COVID-19 pandemic this autumn, it occurred to me that there are two main ways people meet. Here (while this might not be the most eloquent way of putting it), I will refer to them as "hunter-gatherer style" and "agrarian style."

Hunter-gatherer style meetings involve first facing the other party head on and making physical contact, such as a handshake, to confirm that the other person is not an enemy. They then converse based on the premise that they both hold different opinions, and seek to find common ground upon which they can agree.

In agrarian-style meetings, the two parties stand next to each other and face the same direction. They then work in harmony, based on the assumption that they are both heading toward the same goal or destination. This is very similar to how work is carried out on farms.

It seems to me that a sharp spike in COVID-19 transmissions has been observed in countries where a majority of the population engages in hunter-gatherer style meetings. In agrarian-minded societies, meanwhile, the pandemic appears to have spread at a comparatively slower rate.

The ideal goal for hunter-gatherer style meetings is for both parties to elevate each other. Agrarian meetings, on the other hand, seek to form a high-power “union” of sorts.

If “analog” is taken to mean meeting in the flesh, then countries where hunter-gatherer mindsets are more common are able to observe a huge leap in productivity by going digital. (This is because unlike people, AI robots do not have their own individual opinions and therefore easily adapt to fit the needs of the other party.) In such societies there is a powerful impetus to proceed with digital transformation. In Japan, meanwhile, even when staff meet customers face-to-face, their interaction is underpinned by the premise of a common goal, without the interjection of a strong personal opinion, so the resultant service is actually not all that different from what would be provided by AI. This is why Japan was less motivated to push forward with its digital transformation. But this delay in digitization was a significant disadvantage when it came to working remotely.

On the other hand, I also believe the general populace in agrarian-minded societies tends to have a much lower level of resistance toward the rapid progress of digitization. We may well see a significant acceleration in Japan’s digital transformation moving forward.

I do, however, believe there is something we need to be careful about in this regard.

If there is a rapid digital shift in agrarian-minded societies, and AI technology creates a world where, in all kinds of situations, the “person” you’re dealing with adapts their methods to work in harmony with you, then those who don’t harmonize, those who deviate from the norm, and those who are unable to form these so-called “unions” with others may start to be seen as individuals who shouldn’t be there at all.

You often see these kinds of societies portrayed in science fiction novels, and they feel quite suffocating. I think we have already started to see this phenomenon start to take hold on a miniature scale as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

That leaves us with the question: how do we push forward with digitization in an agrarian-minded society like Japan without falling into a stifling sci-fi scenario?

I am among those who believe this is where performing arts have a part to play.

A performing arts piece cannot take shape with one performer alone. Multiple performers come together to work toward the same goal, and the entire team welcomes in the first day of the show’s run together. Forming a “union” with their companions, the team delivers a truly astounding level of power. In other words, theater is very much an agrarian-style endeavor (at least in Japan). And this means that performing arts should take well to being conducted digitally. If you examine each and every one of the tasks that people used to do in person, you come to realize that they can to a very large extent be completed online.

But performing arts will never be a field that attempts to excludes those who seem out of the ordinary, no matter how far digitization goes.

This is because a sense of being ill at ease with oneself is precisely the creative force that inspires performers.

I believe that all humans have something about themselves that doesn’t quite sit right with them. (To give an example, there are very few people who can accept aging for what it is.) Viewing art is a way of reconciling

(even for just a brief moment) with this unmanageable sense of discomfort with ourselves, with the feelings of fear surrounding our struggle to accept ourselves for who we are.

It is those who are no longer able to ignore this feeling of discomfort toward themselves that decide to become performers. This is why no matter how much of the creative process is taken online, performing artists will never be able to erase the second soul that resides within themselves but refuses to form a union. As a result, the idea of seeking to create a place where “others” can belong constantly permeates the performing arts.

If 2020 comes to be seen as the year that the digital transformation of performing arts began, it will also become the first chapter in a grand experiment that endeavors to realize the digital shift without creating a society that stifles or silences.

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## Tokyo Festival 2020 Event Outline

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Name: Tokyo Festival 2020

Festival dates: September 30 (Wed.) - November 29 (Sun.), 2020

Sites: Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre, Owlspot Theatre (Toshima Arts Center), GLOBAL RING THEATRE, Tokyo Tatemono Brillia HALL (Toshima Arts and Culture Theatre) and others in the Ikebukuro area

Number of events: 39 (20 in-person events, 25 online events, 6 in-person events + online events)<sup>3</sup>

Number of attendees: About 29,000 visitors and spectators at in-person events, about 13,000 reach for online events

Organizers: Tokyo Festival Executive Committee

[Toshima City, Toshima Mirai Cultural Foundation, Festival/Tokyo Executive Committee, Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture (Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre & Arts Council Tokyo)]

3: See the program page (<https://tokyo-festival.jp/2020/program/>) on the official Tokyo Festival 2020 website for more details on each event.

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### ■ About Tokyo Festival

Held since 2016, Tokyo Festival is an urban arts festival aimed at connecting the world through Tokyo's diverse and profound art culture. Since 2018, the festival has been jointly held by General Director Satoshi Miyagi (Director of the Arts, Shizuoka Performing Arts Center [SPAC]) and the directors of each project (Planning Team).

▼ Tokyo Festival 2020 Official Site: <https://tokyo-festival.jp/2020/en/>

### ■ Official Social Media Accounts

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/tokyofestivalsince2016/>

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/tokyo\\_festival](https://twitter.com/tokyo_festival)

Instagram: [https://www.instagram.com/tokyo\\_festival/](https://www.instagram.com/tokyo_festival/)



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