

● インタビュー

One Thousand Cranes の作者
コーリン・トーマスさんに聞く

佐々木禎子さんの「千羽鶴」の物語がカナダで劇化されています。バンクーバーの児童劇団グリーン・サム・シアターの「One Thousand Cranes」はカナダ国内はもとより、オーストラリア、ニュージーランド、香港、シンガポール等を巡演、大きな成功をおさめています。今年は文化座の手で「One Thousand Cranes 千羽鶴」として全国公演されます。来日を機に「One Thousand Cranes」の作者コーリン・トーマス氏にお話を聞きました。インタビューに際しては佐々木愛さんをはじめ文化座の方々にお世話になりました。(聞き手は浅川和也・磯山静一／構成・菊地昭男)

— First of all, would you tell us why you wrote the drama “One Thousand Cranes”?

Thomas The Green Thumb Theatre for Young People decided to put on a show about children and peace, and asked me to write it. The Green Thumb is a pioneer in the field of social realism for children.

The Green Thumb often performs plays for children from kindergarten to grade seven and also did a show called “A girl, her motorcycle and a boy” about teenage alcoholism. They have also put on other shows including a very important project about sexual abuse protection. The Green Thumb ran this program for a couple of years and it was made into a film by the National Film Board of Canada. The Green Thumb got the idea for this present play because of a boy in Canada, Leo Habemann. He had tried to get his classmates to send pictures of themselves to the Canadian Ministry of Defence to say “Please don’t test the cruise missiles. These are the reasons why I want to live.” This was the time when Canada was considering testing the cruise missiles. That was a very interesting thing for a child to do.

Then I started my research by talking to Leo

and looking for other information about children and nuclear war. At the library I found a book on Hiroshima by Betty G. Lifton. In it there was a picture of Hiroshima and some mention about Sadako. Another friend of mine was familiar with Eleanor Coerr’s book which I then read.

I wanted to substantiate what I had read in it, but I didn’t know how to contact anyone here. I read a phone book in Vancouver and phoned every number that had “Japanese” in front of it. It was suggested to me that I write to Hiroshima Municipal Hall asking for information. So I did that.

— Would you tell us how the children in Canada think about nuclear war? Are they really frightened?

Thomas As far as my research goes, I also spoke with children in an elementary school. There is a basic belief amongst liberal thinkers that children are very concerned about nuclear war. I was shocked how true it was. Most of the kids I talked to, expect that there will be nuclear war and that they will die within the next few years. They felt there was nothing they could do about it because they were children. Right away my intention was to write a play for kids so that



「One Thousand Cranes 千羽鶴」から

they know there is something they can do about nuclear war.

— What were the difficulties in writing the drama?

Thomas The most interesting part of Sadako's story is Sadako's courage in continuing to fold cranes and the efforts of the Orizuru-kai, Takegumi (her class) in establishing the statue.

I wanted to combine the Japanese and Canadian stories. Because the Japanese story is the historical reality and human part of the play. The Canadian one is the stating of the present reality and of our responsibility for dealing with nuclear problem. You have to find the centre of the drama, the crucial point. That is difficult to clarify. The other difficult thing is trying to produce physical theatre; writing for action not just conversation. This is the most difficult thing to stage. A good example is the race scene of Sadako's story.

It was also difficult for me to write Sadako's story knowing very little of Japanese culture. I went to the Asian Study Center at the University of British Columbia.

Just through looking at paintings in the art gallery, I realized I was dealing with a culture I knew nothing about. However, I had Japanese friends who gave me a lot of advice and assistance.

Canadian actors tend to use intense emotion and eye contact, but a Japanese friend of mine suggested they try to act less emotionally, which was one of many challenges for the actors.

— How was your drama appreciated? What

kinds of reaction did you have?

Thomas The first reaction we had was very negative. We previewed the show before the official opening day at school.

The teachers were very upset. We sent a study guide showing the medical effects of nuclear war.

I think they were afraid that it depicted too graphically the medical effects of nuclear war. Even after seeing the show, which isn't graphic at all, they were still upset. That was a very difficult period. I had to rewrite quite a large amount of the script.

There is a long tradition in Canadian Children Theatre to deal with social issues. Later, it won two prizes.

We did it in Pacific countries: Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand; that was an eighteen week tour. The kids had been very positive about it. They wrote letters, and drew pictures and sent them to us. Some of the letters were perfect, "I used to be really afraid of nuclear war and your play helped me not to be so afraid"; that is exactly what I wanted to do.

I was very concerned at the beginning of my writing that I avoid frightening the children. That was my major concern, but I don't think that has happened at all.

I requested that the show only be performed for children above grade four level. Now I think it would be fine for the whole range of children.

— Finally, would you give us some idea of further action taken by Japanese and Canadian people?

Thomas I think that things like the "Million Cranes project" from Seattle are very exciting. For the Canadian children who sent cranes, it is very meaningful for them and gives them something to do about nuclear war. I think that it is very important to have a monument to help children to remember and participate. That's the real gift of Sadako. Other than that, I think we will coproduce shows to foster understanding and to promote cultural exchanges between Japan and Canada.