

Art Meets Life

Enchanting performance art transforms the urban landscape for the Tokyo Tokyo FESTIVAL.

by Rosie Ball

On a cool September evening people start slowly filing into Adachi Wholesale Market, just a few minutes' walk from Senjuohashi Station in northeastern Tokyo. In its off-hours, the typically bustling marketplace is calm and quiet. However, tonight a 4-tonne cargo truck is parked in



The Adachi Wholesale Market parking lot is filled with light, sound and dance of DANCE TRUCK TOKYO, one of the 13 special events brought by the Tokyo Tokyo FESTIVAL.



The performance is brought to the people, in a truck.

the middle of the square, flanked by two geometric sculptures with hundreds of threadlike ribbons streaming out onto the cement. Glittering in the nearby light projections, the ribbons make it appear as if the truck is caught in the web of a huge, mystical spider. Beyond the market, a Keisei train zooms past and lights from the surrounding buildings shine bright in the darkness. While Tokyo life goes on as usual outside, many of us are not sure what we are about to see here.

The audience is here for DANCE TRUCK TOKYO, a mobile dance performance project produced by the Japan Dance Truck Association as part of the Tokyo Tokyo FESTIVAL (TTF). TTF is an initiative by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the Arts Council Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and

Culture), installing cultural events across the city in the lead up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. Its aim is to generate excitement and enliven the city, celebrating the Tokyo 2020 Games as not just a sporting festival, but also as a cultural festival.

Among the TTF programs, "TTF Special 13" is a program in which 13 projects were selected through an open application process focusing on three core values. The first is "Challenge the Mirai (Future)," emphasizing the power of art to shape cultures. The second is "No Borders," giving people of all ages and backgrounds from Japan and beyond the chance to interact with the arts. The third is "Old meets New," highlighting the intersection between tradition and innovation that lies at the heart of Tokyo's unique culture. Of the 2,436 applicants only 13 were chosen and DANCE TRUCK TOKYO is one of them.

In the year leading up to the Tokyo 2020 Games, the truck with built-in LED lighting and sound system will pop up in 15 different locations across the Tokyo metropolis, including central Tokyo, the Tama district in western Tokyo, and the outlying islands, playing host to numerous cutting-edge artists, sound, and lighting engineers.

Produced by Okazaki Matsue and curated by renowned choreographers Higashino Yoko, Shirai Tsuyoshi, and Suzuki Yukio, each free event is "unique and site-specific, incorporating the particular landscape and personality of the particular location."

At exactly six o'clock the show begins. Immediately the audience is hypnotized, unsure of exactly what they are watching and unable to look away. Each 15-minute performance subverts traditional notions of "dance," skillfully creating drama and meaning through subtle movement, repetition, light, sound, and sometimes even humor.

"We've never seen anything like this before," says a mother standing with her five-year-old daughter who is jumping up and down excitedly. "This kind of thing makes a big impression on children." A Canadian-Japanese couple standing a little farther back echoes these sentiments, keeping an eye on their son and daughter darting through the crowd. "This whole setup with the truck in this historic market creates a kind of surreal experience," they say. "Our kids were a little scared because it was a little mysterious. But they chose to stay. They were asking us, 'what are we supposed to feel?'"

Tonight's event has reached people far and wide through

various means—social media, leaflets, word of mouth. Producer Okazaki and curator Higashino are passionate about bringing Japanese contemporary dance into the public consciousness. Their goal is to have the performing arts "not only in theaters but also in the city... the more we do it in public space, the more expansive it will be." Their ultimate goal is to touch the hearts of the audience in some way. "Japanese contemporary dance is still not well-known," Okazaki says, "I want everyone to see it." Traditional venues are often inaccessible to the public and they sometimes have a harsh impact on the environment. Transforming the truck, which is equipped with solar panels, into a stage is also "a step towards energy-saving and sustainable performances."

This is the perfect opportunity for overseas visitors to immerse themselves in Tokyo's unique cultural aspects—music, dance, theater, and traditional performing arts. The Tokyo Metropolitan Government's choice of performances, delivered to even the smallest corners of Tokyo, demonstrates the city's devotion to promoting creative talent. The Tokyo 2020 Games is not only a sporting festival but a cultural festival, and it is through sharing culture that we can build a harmonious future.



Various programs including arts, dance, music, and theater were held.

Photo: Ichioka Yujiro (TAM. inc)