



The performers manipulate puppets to narrate the dropping of the atomic bomb and its' immediate effects.

# The Grandchildren of Hiroshima

## Evaluation Report

By Marigold Hughes, November 2015





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The testimony of one young girl ,  
Toshiko, is brought to life.



# 1. Project Aims

London Bubble aims to provide the artistic direction, skills, environment and resources to create inspirational, inclusive, involving theatre, which shares stories that animate the spaces of the city and the spirits of its citizens.

In undertaking the project, our aims were as follows:

- To give the survivors the opportunity to reflect on the narrative of their experiences, by being involved in an active process of questioning – driven by the young people.
- To enable children to learn face-to-face about the experiences of the survivors.
- To play a pivotal role in the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations and to share the stories of the survivors with the wider community, as well with visitors to the city
- To help participants to become genuinely engaged in the history of their city, not as passive observers, but through the active embodiment of the lives and minds of the survivors and thereby more likely to become involved in peace initiatives - locally, nationally and internationally.
- To create an artistically powerful production, enabling the people of Hiroshima to share the stories of the survivors with the wider community, as well with visitors to the city
- To give the participants an experience of working in an intergenerational context, working with performers of all ages and by creating a strong network of performers, to encourage similar projects to take place in Hiroshima.
- To use the stories of the survivors to inspire a parallel project in London – ‘After Hiroshima’, which will focus on the legacy of the bomb in the UK and the creation of the CND.
- To enable London Bubble to develop their model of oral history and performance, which can be used in both modern conflict zones and countries coming to terms with past experiences of war.

The meeting of these aims and how we achieved them will be explored in “achievements of the activity.”



## 2. Background

In 2011, London Bubble produced the *Grandchildren of the Blitz* project. This project aimed to uncover the experiences and stories of the survivors of the London Blitz of 1941 and share these stories through an intergenerational, community performance: *Blackbirds*. The impact of the *Grandchildren of the Blitz* project and *Blackbirds* on its local audiences and participants was profound

The survivors' real stories, passed down from elders to the children of the community, gained new life and meaning. One audience member noted that they "hugely enjoyed the authenticity of the show. It showed the real truth, and was so skillfully done." Another said that it "created a vivid picture of the history; it is more human, closer to reality. The combination of children and adults performing was fantastic. My skin had goose bumps when you told the story."

Marigold Hughes, the Project Coordinator of the Blitz project, had previously lived in Kure in Japan – a town situated close to Hiroshima – and had visited the Peace Museum in Hiroshima a number of times. Motivated by the success of this project, Marigold and London Bubble formulated an idea: to engage the survivors of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima - alongside children and adult community performers - in a sharing of stories, experienced by the whole community and culminating in a artistically powerful and rich production.

During the development of *Blackbirds*, a group of artists, led by Minako Eshi, from the Setagaya Public Theatre in Tokyo came to London Bubble to observe rehearsals for "Blackbirds". The team from the Setagaya Public Theatre was deeply impressed by the practice of London Bubble. London Bubble approached Minako Eshi with a proposal: to work alongside Bubble in the creation of a parallel project in Hiroshima. Their response was emphatically positive. In Japan, community theatre is a new movement, but is gaining popularity. The Setagaya is at the forefront of this movement. These artists wanted to learn from the established practice of London Bubble.

For 40 years, London Bubble has created theatre with, by and for, the local community in southeast London. The company has become deeply-embedded locally and undoubtedly changed lives. The prospect of transferring the experience of the company to Japan, in partnership with a leading venue and for the benefit of a different community, was extremely attractive.



The inhabitants of Mayflower Street – a real street in 1945 Bermondsey – introduce themselves.

## 2. Approach to activity

London Bubble creates theatre with and for communities. In this project, we worked with a model developed by the company and referred to as “Vernacular Theatre”. The title “vernacular” is borrowed from a methodology within architecture wherein the community – as opposed to the “experts” - create buildings in their local area. Vernacular Architecture is defined as a mode of building “based on localised needs and construction materials and reflecting local traditions”. In regard to our project, the community was the people of Hiroshima. We were working with a company of 20, aged from 8-80.

The team of practitioners working on the project was as follows:

Yukie Ogasawara	(Co-Producer)
Marigold Hughes	(Co-Producer)
Yorie Akiba	(Co-Director)
Jonathan Petherbridge	(Co-Director)
Misaki Setoyama	(Playwright)
Yasuko Hasegawa	(Designer)
Mirei Tashiro	(Project Co-ordinator)

Within the model of “Vernacular Theatre”, there are a number of stages.

**Stage One- Foraging:** In this stage, material and information about the subject is gathered through research, interviews and workshops. The children undertook interviews with survivors, studied maps of the local area – from both 1945 and 2015, learnt about the hairstyles and clothing/objects of the time.

**Stage Two - Prepping:** The participants sift, taste, shape and test the materials. The performers created pictures and scenes from some of the extracts within the interviews, worked with kimonos to bring the rivers in Hiroshima to life and listened to survivors talk to the group about their experiences.

**Stage Three – Writing the Recipe:** Once the materials have been “prepared” by the participants, we invite in the specialist artists. In this case, Misaki visited the group to see the work in progress and then took the gathered materials away to undertake the third stage “writing the recipe”. After the first draft, participants can comment on the script and “agree” the recipe.

**Stage Four – Cooking:** The participants and the artists work together to create the final production; this stage begins with rehearsal and culminates in a final performance. When the performance is ready, the fifth stage can take place “feasting”.

**Stage Five – Feasting:** The feast is the performance; we invite audiences to enjoy the result and to feast on what has been made. Some of the audience members who come will have been involved in the original gathering process, but over 60% of the audience will have had nothing to do with the project and will not be known to the participants. In Hiroshima, the performance took place at the Aster Plaza from the 6-8<sup>th</sup> August 2015.

Working with this model allows the participants to be “co-authors” of the production; it means that – from the very start – the members of a community are actively engaged in the creation of the work and can enrich the developing ideas with their knowledge of the subject, the history and their shared imaginations.

Working in this way also ensures that community participants and professional artists retain equal status within the creative process. The timeline for the project was as follows:

<b>Day/month/year</b>	<b>*Activity</b>
04/08/14-08/08/14	Oral history training workshops with 25 children in Hiroshima. During this week, 6 initial interviews were set up.
11/08/14-25/08/14	Further interviews were conducted between local children and survivors of the Atomic bombing. 18 interviews in total were conducted and digitally recorded.
26/08/14	Project launch was undertaken in Hiroshima, the participating children and their families attended, alongside a number of survivors and members of the community.
29/08/14	Workshop and project launch took place at the Setagaya Public Theatre in Tokyo
09/01/15-17/01/15	The Japanese artists visited London Bubble to run workshops and learn more about the methodology of the company.
18/01/15-29/01/15	Series of workshops, led by the British and Japanese artists, to creatively explore and dramatise the transcripts, including a community sharing.
10/07/15-5/08/15	Rehearsals for the final performance
06/08/15-08/08/15	Performance run at the Aster Plaza in Hiroshima
13/08/15-17/08/15	Rehearsals and reading at the Setagaya Public Theatre in Tokyo.

In August 2015, **21** rehearsal/performance sessions were held, each of approximately **3** hours, attended by **20** volunteer performers, resulting in an overall total of **1,260** volunteer hours being contributed to the project.

### **3. Description of activity**

The Grandchildren of Hiroshima was an oral history and performance project, beginning with a series of interviews in August 2014, between children in Hiroshima and survivors of the atomic bomb, and culminating in an intergenerational performance, presented at the Aster Plaza in Hiroshima in August 2015 - followed by a reading of the script at the Setagaya Theatre in Tokyo.

The project was designed to align with 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations of the bombing of Hiroshima. Oral history training workshop preceded the interviews in August 2014, led by Marigold Hughes and Yorie Akiba. During these workshops, young people were taught techniques and skills that would help them talk to the elders about their memories of the bombing. Around 20 children participated in the training sessions. Following this week, additional interviews were set up. 18 interviews in total were digitally recorded.

In August 2014, project launches were undertaken in both Hiroshima and Tokyo. In Hiroshima, children involved in the workshops, their families and a number of survivors primarily attended the launch. In Tokyo, the launch at the Setagaya Public Theatre was focused on sharing our work with our industry peers and receiving guidance from them on how to adopt our model to suit the needs of the Japanese participants.

From September 2014, the interviews were translated and transcribed by a number of volunteers in Japan and the UK. In the UK, the volunteers came from Japanese Language Degree courses; these students were keen to gain experience in translation and felt that the project held social and historical value.

In January 2015, the three main Japanese artists – Yorie Akiba (Co-Director), Misaki Setoyama (Playwright) and Yasuko Hasegawa (Designer), travelled to London to gain an insight into the methodology and practice of London Bubble. The artists spent one week with the company, observing a variety of sessions – working with a wide spectrum of different age groups – and leading a number of skill-based sessions, during which they shared aspects of their own practice with practitioners from London Bubble.

In April 2015, the UK based team – Marigold Hughes (Co-Producer) and Jonathan Petherbridge (Co-Director), travelled to Hiroshima to work with the Japanese artists and a number of community participants, to begin to dramatise the testimony and look for narrative connections between the interviews. We led two weeks of workshops, in which ideas were developed and shaped and through which we built our ensemble of performers. Following this period, Misaki Setoyama developed the script – drawing upon the testimonial information of the survivors.

In August 2015, we rehearsed the production with 20 community participants, aged between 8 and 80 years old. The first performance was on August 6<sup>th</sup> – the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Atomic bomb. There were a further 3 performance on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> August. Following the run in Hiroshima, a reading took place at the Setagaya Theatre in Tokyo. As part of a new initiative entitled Hiroshima Dispersed – 10 readings in 7 countries took place around the

around the world: Palestine, the Philippines, US, UK, India, South Africa and Australia.

In the photograph on the slide, Leona and Satsuki interview Sato San – a survivor of the bomb. A section of the interview is played as Leona (below) holds up a recording device in a recreation of the interview.





## 4. Achievements

Key achievements will be outlined in reference to the aims of the project:

- **To give the survivors the opportunity to reflect on the narrative of their experiences, by being involved in an active process of questioning – driven by the young people.**

18 digital interviews were recorded between children and survivors in August 2014. The majority of the survivors had previously spoken about their experiences, but had mainly done so in a presentational context; these survivors had gone into schools and other settings and presented their experiences to an audience of listeners. A number of the survivors commented on their positive experiences of the interview format and that, through the children's questions and through a dialogue-based exchange, they uncovered aspects of their experience that they hadn't previously talked about.

- **To enable children to learn face-to-face about the experiences of the survivors.**

20 children participated in the initial interviews, a number of whom took part in the final production. Prior to the interviews with the survivors, each child participated in oral history training workshops in order to gain skills/techniques that would help them to talk to the elders about their experiences.

Although the children approached these interviews with a certain amount of apprehension, they each conducted confident, clear and respectful conversations with the survivors. These discussions had an evident impact on their reflections on the bombing and the experiences of the elders:

*"Meeting Menda San made everything much more real. I felt I could ask personal questions – ones that I really wanted to find out the answers to. When I had finished talking to her, I thought about how much pain she had been through"*

*(Hlbiki, 9 years old)*

*"When I talked to Sato San, I realized it was not only her lifestyle, but her thinking that had changed after the bombing."*

*(Maila Tashiro, 12 years old)*

*"It was the first time to hear a survivor's experience of avoiding to be sent to war. My heart ached that he felt a sense of guilt for surviving."*

*(Kantaro Matsuo, 16)*

*"I understand more about peace now. People who were bombed with a-bomb still live strongly with a smile. Because there were people before us, who have given all their effort, we have the peace today. We could tell messages through performance."*

*(Kaishu Kittaka, 11)*

The workshop process included group discussions with the children about conflict and peace, stimulated by questions such as: what questions do you have about nuclear weapons and the future? Why do you think countries fight? Why do you fight? What would stop you fighting? Do you think people will ever stop fighting? What would you do to make people and countries stop fighting?

The children's responses were woven into the ending of the performance, wherein the children interrupted the narrative flow of the story to share their own feelings in regard to conflict, the current attitudes to militarism in Japan and the maintenance of peace:

*"I think it's okay to fight, but you have to sympathise and listen to other people. I think that we have to make friends with other countries and that would bring peace."*  
(Hikaru Suzuki, 8)

*"I think that Japan could make a policy that if we found out another country is trying to wage a war with another country – that country would be fined."*  
(Nanoka, 14)

*"I don't think Japan needs soldiers – just a self-defence army for helping and rescuing."* (Hibiki, 11)

*"I would suggest that in return for other countries giving up nuclear weapons, Japan could offer a reward through trade agreements."* (Kantaro, 16)

These children undertook their roles as interviewees and as young peace ambassadors within the performance with total commitment and heartfelt sincerity.

- **To play a pivotal role in the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations, enabling the people of Hiroshima to share the stories of the survivors with the wider community, as well with visitors to the city**

Four performances were presented at the Aster Plaza in Hiroshima across three days, with an additional reading that took place at the Setagaya Theatre in Tokyo. Over 350 audience members attended these performances in total. An English script was made available at the performances in order that non-Japanese speakers could access the stories of the survivors. Additionally, the translated script was uploaded onto the website.

Promotional material for the performance was distributed around the city and advertised on a number of high profile platforms. A blog created to document the project ([grandchildrenofhiroshima.wordpress.com](http://grandchildrenofhiroshima.wordpress.com)) received over 900 views, the project page on the London Bubble website received over 6,000 views and the main project website has received 3,200 views to date.

James Thompson, Professor of Applied and Social Theatre and Associate Vice President for Social Responsibility at Manchester University, was in Japan working on a separate research project and he was able to participate in/observe the sessions in both April and August 2015. In reference to the production being an asset to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations, he stated that:

*"Staged as it was during the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, at a time when many people were acutely aware that this was perhaps the last major commemoration with a living generation of hibakusha present, this representation of young people in dialogue with and retelling the history of the survivors, placed the*

*performance very much in the present tense, responding to the urgency of the contemporary anniversary.” (Professor James Thompson)*

- **To help participants to become genuinely engaged in the history of their city, not as passive observers, but through the active embodiment of the lives and minds of the survivors and thereby more likely to become involved in peace initiatives - locally, nationally and internationally.**

The participants were involved in the project as researchers, co-creators and performers. At every stage, they were involved in the task of drawing upon the stories of the survivors to create a communal theatre experience. Through engaging with the testimony of the “hibakusha”, through making connections between the words of these individuals to weave narratives and make stories, all of the participants expressed an increased connection with the history of the city and with the plight of individuals affected by the bombing:

*“I wanted to learn more about and make theatre based on testimonies of Hibakushas. It was my first time to join a theatre project, but it gave me an opportunity to "subjectively" think about peace and has given me a very good experience. The word "Hibakusha" made an impression that all hibakushas had the same experience. Reading through testimonies, I've learnt and felt that each person had different memories and feelings. Huge appreciation to people who've given us their testimonies!!! I was shocked there was so much I didn't know. This was such a wonderful experience at a time of 70th anniversary. I would like to remember this feeling of gratitude and to think of the importance of peace in my daily life. I will actively take part in projects like this, which can "deliver messages" in the future! I never thought so deeply about the atomic-bombing or the survivors who created the peace we have today. I thought we mustn't forget these. I enjoyed performing very much! I never thought so much about the atomic bombing, and this has given me a chance to think about what it was like for those who lived the time. It was a wonderful experience.”*

*(Aya Miyaji, 20 years old)*

*“Although I live in Hiroshima, I haven't been doing peace activities and such. I wanted to express the issue through theatre. I thought about the way I would live my life as third generation Hibakusha, thinking of predecessors who have lived strong. The fondness of the piece grew even stronger as we got into theatre. All the people who took part, the stage, props...all of these feel dear to me.”*

*(Hiyori Hayashi, 28 years old)*

*“Having done the project, I gained more than I expected. I do tour guide for work, but places like Peace park and the city of Hiroshima often are introduces as beautiful places. I came to think again that there is history that made the scenery today. More over, we must not make another sad city. I learnt the importance of keeping this scenery we have today to the future. There were many things that I felt I knew, but didn't. Most of my friends who came to see the show said they want to think about peace or have actually gone to the peace museum after a few years. I thought it was good that I jumped in to the project, just for that.”*

*(Mihoko Ariyoshi, 36 years old)*

*“Although we worked with only a relatively small number of testimonies, I could imagine that so many others have gone through the same experience,*

*and my feeling grew again that we must not repeat another war. I felt close to people who are making actions for peace over the world, doing what they can, and I'm thankful that I could take part in that. I was born and brought up in Hiroshima, so I must hand these voices down."*  
(Fuji Suzuki, 43 years old)

Of the participants that took part in the feedback process, 100% stated that they had learnt something new about the atomic-bombing of Hiroshima or the experience of Hibakusha through interviews, workshops, and rehearsals. 67 % stated that taking part in the project would have an impact upon their attitude or how they would behave in the future.

- **To create an artistically powerful production, enabling the people of Hiroshima to share the stories of the survivors with the wider community, as well with visitors to the city.**

Through the workshop process, pre-rehearsal planning and rehearsals – we were constantly and consistently building up the fabric of the production: what it might sound like, what it might look like and how we would use our bodies and voices - and the audience - to help us tell our stories. The design of the performance was ever evolving; responding to the ideas of the creative team, the participants and to the needs of the space. Drawing on the extracts of testimony, research and the shared imagination of our community performers, we created a chronological account of what happened before, during and after the Atomic bombing of August 6<sup>th</sup> 1945.

One of the key structural devices for the performance was the use of recorded audio footage from the interviews, consisting of the children's questions and the interviewees' responses. Not only did this structural device allow the process of the project to be mirrored in the product, but it also kept the voices of the children and the elders at the core of the story.

The people of Hiroshima, and any visitors to the city, were not seeing a fictionalized piece of work, nor were they seeing a singular version of history through one account/testimony/interview – but that they were an active part of an interwoven portrait of real people, real voices real experiences and real histories. The children that were in front of the audience – embodying the stories of the children that lived through the bombing – were not children in 1945, but they easily could have been. The voices of elders summoned younger version of themselves and put these selves in front of us.

The faint thread of time between the "then" and "now" grew turned into an infinitely more tangible line; moments from long ago landed in the space in a tumble of plaster falling onto a young girl, a teenager being trapped under a roof, a young boy racing around the city to find his mother– just to see her die in front of him

The production received an overwhelming positive level of feedback. Due to the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorations, there were many tourists visiting the city and therefore both residents of Hiroshima and a significant number of tourists were able to see the production. Out of a sample group of 137 audience respondents, 99 % stated that the performance was "excellent" or "very good". 82 % stated that they had gained new information about Hiroshima. Comments included:



*"It was the first time I ever saw something called theatre. I was amazed to discover such a powerful, befitting way of expression to deliver and to communicate"*

*"Beautifully directed and I was drawn in. It felt as if illustrating the hardness of human beings rather than the devastation of atomic bombing."*

*"In every part, the piece was sensitive and delicate, and I was greatly moved. Listening to the voice of survivors touched me to the core."*

*"I sensed through my eyes, ears, and body. A different style to theatre I have seen, and it was quite special. I felt through my senses the firsthand experience of the time, which was before unimaginable."*

*"Moving and fresh take on an oft-told history. The pared down set and almost dance-like blocking were powerfully evocative. Extraordinary and moving."*

*"Simply stunning."*

- **To give the participants an experience of working in an intergenerational context, working with performers of all ages and by creating a strong network of performers, to encourage similar projects to take place in Hiroshima.**

One of the pillars of London Bubble's practice is to facilitate opportunities for people of all ages to come together and make theatre. In everyday life, in both the UK and Japan – there are limited opportunities for people of different ages to come together on an equal footing and make things.

Using the Vernacular Theatre model, adults, young people and children can bring their unique contributions – according to their age, skillset and experience – to enrich the experience for everyone. The input of children is no less valued than the input of adults; everyone's voice is listened to, respected and taken on board. It creates a social utopia in microcosm and everyone present benefits from this way of working:

*"By coming together with people of generations that I don't usually come in contact with, I felt enlivened in a new way."  
(Hiyori Hayashi, 28 years old)*

*"Even elementary school children learnt deeply about peace and expressed their own thoughts. It was good to hear opinions of different age groups.  
(Aya Miyaji, 20 years old)*

*"Meeting various people of different ages made me want to be involved in more projects like this in future. I don't have many opportunities to interact with children, so it was nice to get to know what kind of things they are feeling, and they've given me energy. I could also hear many stories from the past from Usami san, who is in her 80's. Making the show and the steps to construct the show was interesting."  
(Mihoko Ariyoshi, 36 years old)*

*"I don't often get a chance to be with little children. Interacting with them made me feel peaceful. History of Hiroshima, interacting with people of various generations, performance...I learnt a lot!"*

(Rio Maniwa, 22 years old)

*“Meeting everyone at this workshop felt like a prize, for I had difficult twenties but lived through those ten years not beaten by the pain. The power, voice, presence, ideas of young people/children. I spent everyday looking forward to seeing everyone.”*

(Yuka Sunakake, 35 years old)

*“It's said that many kids nowadays cannot communicate own thoughts or what they want to say, but every child openly and directly expressed their opinion, and it was very nice. At the other end of the age spectrum, I was taught about the life during the war. It was great that people of completely different generations came together and became a team. Each and everyday was a lot of fun... it was nice to see my child grow stronger day by day.”* (Fuji Suzuki, 43 years old)

Building up an intergenerational company was not only valuable in view of the wellbeing of the participants and their experience of the process, but also in regard to the impact of this ensemble on the narrative of the performance. The range of ages represented on stage, created a believable representation of Hiroshima's community – in present and historical terms.

In seeing this “micro” community working together and in observing the relationships between the various age groups and the warmth that existed between them, the sense of how Hiroshima managed to recover and rebuild so quickly was eminently apparent; the bonds that are created between humans and community are not easily broken, not even in the face of a nuclear attack do these bonds fracture. The story of the recovery of a community was not told, moreover it was shown – and working this ensemble enabled us to show it.

Professor James Thomson commented that:

*“Grandchildren of Hiroshima had an explicit focus on the notion of relationships within the actual performance. Relationships between elder cast members and younger participants were staged under the lights but were also built and realised in the rehearsals... There was an ethics of caring, respecting and creating that shone through this play that was a moving, and a dynamically inspiring response to the horrendous history of the second world war, and the attacks on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that seemed to be at the apex of its cruelty and craven brutality. Grandchildren of Hiroshima did not create new shadows of those horrors, but glimmers of new relationships that sought to communicate the difficulty of remaining respectful of a past but fully aware of the challenging relevance of the event of August 6<sup>th</sup> 1945 to the relationships we are part of today.”*

- **To use the stories of the survivors to inspire a parallel project in London – ‘After Hiroshima’, which will focus on the legacy of the bomb in the UK and the creation of the CND.**

*After Hiroshima* is a UK based project inspired by the Grandchildren of Hiroshima. It is an oral history and performance project which is rooted in interviews with people about their reactions to atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945 and their memories of the subsequent period during which the CND and peace movement was formed. Initially, the project will draw upon the

testimonies of the survivors and then the research – most of which will be handled by volunteers - will progress to cover a wide range of issues.

The volunteer research team will learn how people received the news of the bombing, what reaction came from Japanese people living in the UK and how families of British servicemen who had served in the Far East, or had been prisoners of war under the Japanese, felt at the time. The project will examine the period up to October 1963 when an international Test Ban Treaty was signed by the United States, the UK and the then Soviet Union. The early days and protests by the peace movement will also be explored.

The testimonies and research gathered will then be disseminated through a series of prepping workshops, shared internally through a number of events, exhibited to the public by means of a pop-up exhibition roadshow and eventually form the basis of a new script for a show which will be performed by an intergenerational, community cast. The project will also form the basis of training workshops and support pack for teachers. The archive of information uncovered will be shared with the Hiroshima Peace Museum.

- **To enable London Bubble to develop their model of oral history and performance, which can be used in both modern conflict zones and countries coming to terms with past experiences of war.**

In the UK, London Bubble has had extensive experience of the model of Vernacular Theatre and it has been used, and referenced, multiple times within projects and programmes, but this is the first time that the company has used the model outside the UK.

One of the most affirming and informative moments of the project happened in the initial set of workshops in April, when the participants immediately engaged with the creative exploration of the survivors' testimonies; images of b29's, air-raid drills, a shattered Hiroshima and a swaddled, futon-covered family gradually filled the room. As the participants grouped together to tease the action out of the survivors' testimonies and give the stories life and meaning, a realization began to surface: it was working. The approach we wanted to employ, the approach that we thought, and had been warned, might be too much/too different or simply just not matched to Japanese culture, was working as well here as it did in London.

Over the course of the first week, the participants brought more and more of these stories to life and some striking moments were created: the haunting repetition of the air-raid drills wherein children were taught to block their ears and cover their eyes – lest their eye-balls pop out, the playful behaviour of little children in amongst the ruins of the city, family scenes that brought together the scale of ages in the room and which brought an eerie sense of reality to the devastation. Likely and unlikely friendships started to develop between folk of all ages (girls on the verge of adolescence flocked together, young men became boys again as they played with versions of their youngers selves) and the group started to become a company.

The fabric of community theatre is as stunningly beautiful in Japan as it is anywhere as– the vast sweep and scale of images created, the varied textures of ages, faces and experiences, the direct transference of life into theatre and the focused will towards collective collaboration and creation.

The aims and outputs of Vernacular Theatre are as relevant in Japan as they are in London and the company will continue to develop this model outside of the UK.

- **To contribute to the ongoing professional development of the practitioners involved in the project**

The format of community theatre – and projects that interweave elements of oral history into performance – is relatively new in Japan. In addition, there are approaches to making theatre in Japan that felt completely new for the British practitioners. Within the scope of the project, there were multiple new discoveries to be made; in regard to the content of the stories, the approach to the work and the stylistic preferences of the team, that had a very positive impact on the experience of the team:

*“It was an eye-opening experience for me that opened new interest and possibilities within myself” (Mirei Tashiro, Project Co-ordinator)*

*“It was in the top three most important things to have happened to me professionally across 40 years.” (Jonathan Petherbridge, Co-Director)*

*“It’s been a bit of a struggle to remember what I wanted to do since coming back to Japan. This project felt a bit of a homecoming for me, reminding me of the kind of projects I enjoy and get inspired by.” (Yasuko Hasegawa)*

*“It gave me a fresh sense of the importance of exchanging thoughts and creative ideas, whilst maintaining respect for different cultural backgrounds” (Yorie Akiba, C-Director)*



## 5. Future Developments

Whilst performing in Hiroshima, a number of our audience members suggested that we should consider touring the production to other countries; that the story of Hiroshima, as gathered and told by the people of the community – in collaboration with creative practitioners from the UK – had an important life outside Japan.

Alongside the importance of telling the stories of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima - which has particular relevance to the UK at a time when we are in the midst of reviewing our own nuclear arsenal – we believe that sharing our model of making community theatre also has huge value and importance.

We are currently looking into the possibility of bringing the production to the UK and/or taking it to the US.

We are also editing a sub-titled film of the performance, which will be uploaded to the project website and the London Bubble site and which will be circulated via social media. We are also hoping to hold a screening of the film in Spring 2016.

The culminating performance of *After Hiroshima* will also take place in Spring 2016.



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For more information, contact [Marigold Hughes](#) or [Jonathan Petherbridge](#). For the project website, click [here](#), for the London Bubble website, click [here](#).

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The testimony of one young girl , Yoshiko, and her experience of the roof falling in on her – due to the impact of the bomb – is brought to life.

