



# Shoko



Fotos © Joachim Riederer

# Nakamura

Principal Dancer at Berlin Ballet, interviewed by Mihaela Vieru

***Did you do what you started out to do, or did it just happen?  
Was dancing what you wanted?***

When I started taking classes I was a very young girl. My mother took me to the Ballet Academy in Fukuoka where I took my first lessons in ballet. For me, nevertheless, it was a game. I went to class everyday but only considered it as a play. Of course I was only six years old. Slowly, as I started to understand a bit more what it really was all about what I was doing in the studio, I started to enjoy my classes in another way; even though it was still fun and a game I could understand that there was something more. When I was 16, I won the Grand Prix de Lausanne and got a scholarship for the John Cranko School in Stuttgart. The truth is that ballet as I know it and understand it today began with my experience in Stuttgart.

***Let's get back to your beginnings. What were you like as a kid?  
How did it happen that you went to that first dance class?***

As a kid I was a normal girl. I was happy and protected as most kids are. I remember being outgoing and enjoying to be together with my family.

It is quite funny how I began with ballet. My mother realized that dancers have beautiful bodies, and always look strong, alert and erect. She considered that they looked elegant and distinguished; so of course she felt that she wanted for me to look elegant and distinguished as well. So, by the age of 6, I went to ballet classes. As you realize, if it wasn't for my mother's estetic desires, I wouldn't be here talking to you today. It's funny how some things begin.

***What was school like for you?  
When did you begin dancing professionally?***

Although I began studying ballet and took my first classes in Fukuoka, I consider my first real school the John Cranko School in Stuttgart. This was my first real approach to the real ballet world. It was very hard at first. Although I had won the Grand Prix de Lausanne there were many things I did not know about ballet and my body. My technique was not strong and my body was not toned up as it would become later. I remember how my teacher Mrs Mitreuter told me again and again: "All you have learned in Japan is wrong!" And although this was very hard for me, it was also very important for my future development. I started working stronger, trying to learn as much as possible, changing my body, my condition... basically starting all over and relearning all I thought I already knew.

***What did you like to read? Were there any books, or teachers, that influenced you, or that were memorable for you?***

I like reading very much. It gives me the peace of mind and calmness which I sometimes need. I am a big fan of the Japanese author Haruki Murakami. His books are very expressive especially in the character construction. Most of his characters seem very honest and true to themselves. I try, in my way, to add these ingredients to my own construction of characters on stage.

***How old were you when you joined the Berlin Ballet?  
How do you like working here?***

When I joined the Staatsballett Berlin I was 25 years old. I was working with the Vienna Staatsoper at that time and one day Vladimir Malakhov visited the company. After the performance he approached me and told me that he would like to invite me to be a member of his company in Berlin. At that time I didn't think about moving because I was very happy in Vienna, doing a lot and advancing quickly through the ranks. So my response to him was "No, thank you!"

By the time, things began to change in Vienna and I realized that I had done all I had to do with the company over there and decided to continue growing as a dancer and artist. So the decision to change company was the right thing to do. I called Malakhov and told him that I was ready now for the change. Although he was a bit surprised he told me I could join the company. So here I am.

### **Which is your favorite dancing partner?**

This is a difficult question for me to answer since I really enjoy working with all my partners. There is something to learn by them and something to give to all of them. I believe that the word partner means more than just appearing on stage for a performance. Behind this appearance on stage there are hours of hard work and sweating



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together in the studio which finally make you be an artist. I love working with Kumakawa and I perform with him in K-Ballet as much as my schedule in Europe allows it. I just did Swan Lake and Carmen with his company a few weeks ago. He knows so much and is so strong as a dancer and partner that it is a pleasure to work with him. Working with Rony Savkovic is also great! His personality and attitude towards work make even the most difficult ballets a pleasure to rehearse and perform. With Rony we perform a lot together in Berlin, we spent the summer in Japan performing and now we go to big galas in NYC and in June we'll go back to Taipei, Asia. But I also enjoy working with Wislaw Dudek and Giuseppe Piccone very much and this has been a great experience to me.

### **I can't think of any other art form that's so physically demanding. How do you train and prepare?**

It is a demanding art form! It is difficult for the body! I believe there is no dancer in the world who does not have some kind of pain in his body. Nevertheless, the pleasure of doing it is stronger. All of us must learn and have learnt to deal with pain since we were kids. I take class everyday, which helps very much to deal with pain and gain flexibility. I even try to take classes on Sundays (even when I am off) when I feel my body needs it. I also believe eating diet food is fundamental. I eat very healthy food. Since I am Japanese I love eating Japanese food which contains many nutritious elements, it is very healthy and I enjoy eating it very much. Normally I cook Japanese food at home.

### **What are you doing when you're not working on a show or performing in it?**

When I am not in the theater I enjoy going out for long walks around the city. I like watching people while I walk. It is very relaxing just to be alone and walk and think. I go to cafés, I read... I am a very calm woman. You will not see me dancing in clubs or discos ... I dance on stage (smiles). I am also a big fan of films. If I don't go to the cinema I am always watching films at home. I have a big DVD collection at home and I enjoy just sitting and watching movies for hours.

### **What do you think is the biggest misconception that people have about dancers?**

I think the biggest misconception is that most people do not realize what it really takes to be a dancer or an artist in general. I think that many people look at a ballerina on stage and say that's very sweet but they do not comprehend the effort people make who are on stage. Many people don't realize that for most of the dancers who are on stage getting to be on stage has taken a lot of very hard personal decisions and sacrifices and long long hours in the studio, and on stage. Many of us (most of us) have left our own countries and families to do what we love to do. To be an artist is not an 8 hour job which you stop when you go home every afternoon. Being an artist is something you live with and it will be forever.

### **What are your long-term plans for the future? Have you thought about what you are going to do when you stop dancing?**

Normally I don't think very often about having to stop dancing... I still hope I'll have many years before that happens. I have got many plans for the future and I realize that most of them involve me as a woman and as a dancer.... It is difficult to separate one from the other. I want to develop more as a woman, I believe that the fact of growing as a woman is good for the stage. It is difficult to realize that one day you are not a child anymore and that you are a woman with responsibilities in normal life as well as on stage that demand a complete different approach... I am working on this right now.

Of course I would like to have children some day... but this can wait a bit longer. I am still young and have got professional obligations and desires I want to accomplish before that.

One of my biggest dreams at the moment is to dance Giselle. I have still not had a chance to do so... so between being a woman, growing as a woman, growing on stage, taking classes everyday, performing, touring, cooking Japanese food and waiting to do Giselle I have a pretty tight schedule... (laughs)...