

On Broadway

Kumiko Yoshii is the president and co-founder of Gorgeous Entertainment, a New York-based theater, film and special events production company which also promotes exchange among American and Japanese people and entertainment businesses. *The Japan Journal's* Osamu Sawaji caught up with the influential Japanese producer.

Kumiko Yoshii fell in love with musical movies and theater when she was in grade school, having been moved by films and stage productions such as the *Wizard of Oz*, *Sound of Music* and *My Fair Lady*. When she was in high school, she was passionate about the Takarazuka Revue.

“Back then, I was always attracted to theater, but it did not occur to me to make it my career,” says Yoshii. “I was mesmerized by the world on stage, so much so that I was not aware of the numerous people, like directors and producers, who were involved behind the scenes.”

Yoshii transferred to a university in New York in 1987. She got a job at a law firm in New York after

graduating and subsequently changed her career to go into investment banking as a financial analyst specializing in M&A. This is when she discovered Broadway as a business. One of the owner's sister at her company was a playwright who often had her plays performed on Broadway, so there was frequent talk about work related to Broadway at the office.

“I realized that there is business side to the world of Broadway. If it's a business, I thought that there must be a place in it for me, so I decided to get into the show business,” says Yoshii. “Until then, I did not have a specific career goal, but I was able to clearly have a dream for my future for the first time.”

From that moment on, in an effort to create a connection to Broadway, Yoshii made a point of telling everyone she knew and met that she would like to work on Broadway. She continued to expand her network by meeting people who were involved in the business through friends or friends of friends. Before long, she started a part-time job at a small company that produces musicals on Broadway, but since she was unable to make a living that way, she also took on jobs with specialist M&A magazines and management consulting. In addition, she attended graduate school at night to study performing arts management.

Yoshii then established Gorgeous Entertainment Inc. in 1997. Ever since, she has been working across genres, including producing plays and movies, providing consultation on investing in musicals and coordinating special events such as fine art exhibitions and food festivals.

One of Yoshii's achievements has been introduc-



Kumiko Yoshii



An ice-breaking demonstration at Japan Day @ Central Park in 2008

ing Japanese directors to the United States. One of the leading works in this area was the Broadway revival in 2004/5 of *Pacific Overtures*, which was directed by Amon Miyamoto. *Pacific Overtures*, which was first performed on Broadway in 1976, is set in Japan in 1853 and portrays the state of the wavering mindset of the Japanese people as Japan opened its doors to the rest of the world. Miyamoto's *Pacific Overtures*, which was the first work in Broadway history to have been directed by a Japanese, achieved high praise. In 2005, it was nominated in four categories at the Tony Awards, the Academy Awards of theater in the United States.

"As a producer, I was always thinking how I would like to assist artists in realizing their dreams," states Yoshii. "Miyamoto's foray into Broadway was undoubtedly his dream as well as mine."

Yoshii has been involved in numerous other projects that connect Japan and the United States. One of them is Japan Day @ Central Park for which Yoshii serves as the Executive Producer. Supported by the Consulate General of Japan in New York, and sponsored by Japanese and U.S. corporations, Japan Day has been held in Central Park every year since 2007, aimed at promoting exchange among American and Japanese people,

Curtain call for a performance of *Pacific Overtures*, which was directed by Amon Miyamoto at Studio 54, New York, in 2004/5



serving as an expression of gratitude toward the city of New York and reinforcing the solidarity of the community consisting of Japanese and Americans of Japanese descent. Japan Day is an event that offers many different kinds of activities, including stage performances of Japanese drums, karate demonstrations, and live-band performances as well as booths in which one can try out origami or calligraphy and eat Japanese foods. It also holds the Japan Run, a four-mile run within Central Park.

"We also introduce a fusion of Japanese and U.S. culture, which is something that is unique to New York, such as a collaboration of jazz and *shamisen* [a traditional Japanese musical instrument]," says Yoshii.

Last year, the number of visitors stood at around 45,000, and many people have become interested in Japan. The seventh event this year will be held on May 12.

Yoshii has helped to introduce numerous works of Broadway to Japan to date. Last year, she was involved in work on staging *Shrek the Musical* in China, and currently, she is pushing ahead with preparations of a musical targeting Broadway.

Yoshii is planning on bringing a U.S. national tour of the musical *Dreamgirls* to Tokyo and Osaka this summer.

"Going forward, I would like to continue to assist in collaborations between Japan and the United States," says Yoshii. 