

# Elevator Chat: Maryland-based Director, Choreographer and Dancer Naoko Maeshiba



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October 05, 2014 Arts Across Maryland



A Japanese native living in Baltimore since 2004, Naoko Maeshiba is an associate professor at Towson University, and a member of the [MSAC's Maryland Performing Artist Touring Roster](#). Through a Maryland Touring Grant to Baltimore Theatre Project, Maeshiba performed her original piece, *Twilight Station*, in early 2014. The piece was commissioned especially for Quest Visual Theatre's Wings Company, an ensemble of deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing performers who receive training in visual theatre and educational methodology.

**MSAC:** What interested you in the art of dance and what keeps you interested now?

**NM:** I was engaged in rigorous sport for many years. Then, much later, I discovered the art of dance in graduate school, and was astounded that the body can express such complex ideas, feelings, and sensations. I found tremendous joy in this art form. I'm in awe of its power.

**MSAC:** You practice under the name "Kibism." What does that word mean and how does it relate to your work or aspirations?

**NM:** “Kibi” in Japanese means “delicate inner workings which might not appear on the surface.” It also means “strange beauty.” This is the foundation for all my work. I aspire to offer a theatrical experience that taps into the different states of consciousness and opens multiple channels of communication. My audience might not understand it in their heads, but they will experience it intuitively through a more universal language.

**MSAC:** A 2014, MSAC Maryland Touring Grant helped fund the performance of your original piece *Twilight Station* at Baltimore Theatre Project as part of QuestFest. What is the piece about?

**NM:** It follows the journey of three individuals through three dimensions of time and space. The first part is the group’s encounter in the everyday life, the second part happens in their dreams and the last part trips from the ancient to the future. In grasping the individual life’s moments through multiple frames, I was hoping that we get to experience various aspects of these three human beings.

**MSAC:** Did you approach the process of creating *Twilight Station* differently, since it was commissioned specifically for performers who are deaf or hard of hearing?

**NM:** I was perhaps more aware of how to connect with the performers and with the audience. I paid attention to the different ways that the performers were responding to the same exercise and tried to incorporate the uniqueness of each into the performance. In terms of the audience, we wanted to make sure that deaf audience could feel the sound. We placed the speakers on the ground to strengthen the base component.

**MSAC:** You’ve been quoted saying, “I want ten percent (of my theatre) happening on stage and ninety percent happening in the mind of the audience.” Does dance theatre ask more from its audiences than other art forms?

**NM:** I think anything that’s not based on the clear-cut narrative would ask more from its audiences. I think the challenging part is that it asks for a very serious encounter between the performers and the audience. The performer is communicating with the audience in a specific way through a language that doesn’t have a name. The audience has to allow that to reach the inside of them. It is a self-reflective journey. A joyful one, I hope.