

## Yuriko Takagi— Ayatori Residency, Personal Reflection

In conversation with Keith Michael

*What were your expectations and objectives at the start — especially moving from remote work to meeting in person?*

At the beginning, I was honestly afraid — and also excited. You musicians are used to doing things live, in the moment, on stage. I'm not. I've had some experience in collaborative settings before, but not like this, and not with the added element of AI.

It felt like stepping into an unknown world: new people, new working methods, new technology, and a new kind of risk. I worried a lot — but it wasn't "bad worry." It was the kind of worry that comes with something meaningful. If you feel completely confident, it's not always a good sign. Uncertainty is important. It can be a vital element in making something exciting.

At the same time, I was confident in what I do as an artist. The uncertainty was more about what we would do *together* — how our different ways of thinking and working would connect once we were in the same room.

Working remotely helped me more than I expected. When you work remotely, you can't rely on the people around you in the same way. You have to be yourself. You have to make decisions independently, and that creates a kind of strength — even a kind of safety — because you build something from your own centre.

Then, when we finally met, I found I was surprisingly open to working together. I enjoyed the people I was collaborating with, so I didn't feel stress in a negative way. It was much more fun than I expected — and fun really matters. Even with uncertainty, the experience has to feel alive and enjoyable.

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*What was the feeling of difference with musicians that you arrived with to the residency?*

Photography can be "live" in the moment of shooting — you make fast decisions, you respond to a space, a person, light, movement. In that sense, it is similar to performing. But the big difference is that the result is shown later. I take the photograph, and then later I edit it, shape it, decide, and I can do all of that alone.

On stage, the result happens once — and then it's gone. That is fascinating to me. It feels risky, and that tension is addictive. Maybe that's why actors and musicians get attached to performance: you can't change it afterward, and it's never the same twice. It's intense, but it's beautiful.

With photography, the image stays forever — but the experience of taking it has already passed. And interestingly, when my photographs are framed and placed on a wall, I sometimes stop feeling they are “mine.” I look at them objectively, almost like: “Who took this? Interesting.” It becomes separate from me.

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*Beyond nervousness, what were you curious about as you entered the residency?*

I was curious about musicians — what you are like in daily life, not just in the music. I wanted to understand how you react, how you work, how you get nervous, how you suddenly start playing, how quickly your energy changes. I’d spoken remotely with Ed for a long time, but meeting and living and working together is completely different.

The residency wasn’t only studio time. We spent time at home, eating together, talking — or not talking — and that whole shared time shaped the collaboration. It gave me a real sense of the group as people, not just artists.

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*What was your experience with combining different “languages” — visual thinking and sound thinking — in one process?*

I’m very visual, and the musicians are very sound-focused. We had common ground — that’s why the collaboration exists — but our processes are different.

For me, it felt like weaving: visual and sound threads coming together, crossing over each other, becoming one thing. It was an experience I can’t create alone. That was one of the most valuable parts for me: making something together that neither side would arrive at by themselves.

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*Did this experience change your own practice — especially your relationship between sound and image?*

Yes, it changed something important. Normally, I begin with a visual idea and then think about sound. But working remotely with Ed showed me the opposite is possible: to start from sound and allow images to emerge from sound.

That was a beautiful discovery. It also connects to something I’ve wanted for a long time: I dream of making a feature film one day. This experience made me feel that film could begin not only from visuals, but from sound — letting sound lead the decisions for image, rhythm, pacing, and atmosphere. If I can combine both approaches — visual-first and sound-first — it could open a new direction in my work.

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*What does improvisation mean to you, watching musicians improvise?*

Improvisation is deeply interesting. Of course, I improvise in photography too — I may plan something, but in the moment it often becomes something else. But musical improvisation feels different.

When it's really good, it seems beyond consciousness — beyond intention. It's not forcing an outcome. It's not controlling. It's allowing the sound to flow. And when that happens, the audience can flow with it too. Even if I don't understand music in a technical way, I can feel when it's working.

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*How did you experience the attempt to combine sound, visuals, and dancers? What would you change?*

Honestly, we needed more time. We didn't reach the point we wanted.

If we do it again, I think the dancers should spend a lot of time watching the images first — many times. When dancers perform, they can't really see the projection while they are moving, so the images risk becoming only "background." I wanted them to absorb the visuals and sound more deeply first and then move from what they feel.

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*How did technical issues and the space affect the work, especially in the first days?*

The early technical problems were difficult. We lost time, and that is painful when the residency is short. But it also forced us to change direction. And maybe the original plan wasn't right for that space anyway.

In the end, the single large screen became surprisingly powerful. A full "cube" environment could be beautiful, but if it isn't perfect it can become worse. In that venue, one strong image on one screen was enough — especially with the reflection on the floor. The scale was huge and immersive.

So even though the technical problems were stressful, they also led us to discover something: sometimes less is stronger, and you only learn that through experience.

That said, the later technical failures were genuinely traumatic for me. After Cornwall, I carried a fear into London that something would break again. In London there was one small mistake, but it was human error — a wrong button press — and it was quickly fixed. Working with someone highly technical and responsive helped me relax. It showed me that my "low-tech" nature can still work well if the collaboration is respectful and balanced.

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*How did the schedule (including two different public sessions in two weeks) affect the creative process?*

I think it would have been better to focus on one venue. Two sharings in two different places meant two sets of conditions and two different problems. If it were the same place twice, you could improve for the second showing. But because it was different venues, it created new issues rather than building on progress. Concentrating time in one place would have allowed deeper development.

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*What are your reflections on the AI collaboration — what did you hope for, and what did you see?*

I don't have technical knowledge of AI, so I had to trust the AI collaborator. At first I was fascinated by the way the system translated everything into numbers and signals — it was a new world.

But my hope was that it would become something more collaborative — something that truly responded to us and created something unexpected. In the first stage, it didn't reach that point. It felt like it remained inside one person's method rather than becoming a shared language. We were hoping for surprise — something new that we couldn't imagine.

Later, by contrast, a different approach felt more successful to me: when the “AI element” was not obvious, but integrated. Sometimes the most difficult and mature approach is when the technology is embedded — you don't notice it as an effect, but it subtly shapes the experience. That kind of balance felt strong.

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*Would you do this kind of collaboration again? And what about showing Ayatori in Japan?*

Yes — I would do it again, even though it would come with worry and fear. That uncertainty is part of the process.

I would love to show Ayatori in Japan, but I'm not sure yet what the right context is. It needs both good sound and a good visual space. Maybe a photography museum, or a film festival that can include performance/hybrid forms. Spiral in Aoyama is a beautiful venue, but expensive — so it would need a festival or institutional support.

What I like most is the idea that the collaboration can continue in a simple way: exchanging material again — image to sound, sound to image — and allowing something unexpected to emerge over time.

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