

harmony

Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association

Winter 2012

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A New Legend of Peruvian Music Takes to the Stage in Japan



A New Legend of Peruvian Music on stage

Organized by Min-On, and cosponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Peru, Prom-Peru, and the Embassy of Peru in Japan, a successful concert tour of Peruvian artists entitled *A New Legend of Peruvian Music* played to audiences in nine cities in Japan as well as several venues in Taiwan during the months of November and December 2011.

Onstage together for this unique collaboration were award-winning singer Mac Salvador and a group of Andean musicians representing modern Andean folk music, the

outstanding Afro-Peruvian group El Colectivo Palenke, and Juan Medrano “Cotito,” a Latin Grammy Award-winning master percussionist. The ensemble captivated audiences with melodic vocals, the evocative sounds of various folk instruments, and infectious rhythms. The music was complemented by the acrobatic footwork of Afro-Peruvian dance in both contemporary and traditional styles.

The concert concluded with extended applause for a joint performance of the beloved music of *El Condor Pasa*.

“I felt like I was playing music for my neighbors.”

Interview with virtuoso Cajón player Juan Medrano “Cotito”

Min-On: You are an acclaimed *cajón* player and have even been appointed as an ambassador of the *cajón* by the Peruvian government. Please tell us about the instrument.

Juan Medrano “Cotito”: This unique percussion instrument originated in Peru. During the colonial period, the Spaniards brought African slaves to Peru for their colonization of the coastal desert area known as the *costa*. The slaves brought with them the music of Africa, and this gradually blended with the music of the indigenous people, as well as some elements from European music, creating the unique musical culture we know today as *criollo*. The *cajón* was born out of that process.

The word *cajón* literally means *box*—a simple wooden box became this unique percussion instrument, which has become an integral part of Afro-Peruvian music, and is now used widely in many different genres of music around the world. The *cajón* has even found its way back to Spain, and is now an essential instrument in flamenco music.

Min-On: What was your impression of *A New Legend of Peruvian Music*?

Cotito: It was a wonderful production, and I really want to thank Min-On for organizing and promoting such a unique collaborative performance. Mac Salvador and his band were first to come onstage. He is one of the most popular artists from the Andean music scene, and he has a unique and beautiful voice. Then we had El Colectivo Palenke representing

Afro-Peruvian music with a superbly dynamic performance. Although the *cajón* is usually played in traditional styles of music, they have created exciting arrangements of pieces played in modern styles.

I really enjoyed playing *cajón* onstage with these two groups of artists from diverse genres of Peruvian music—something I never experienced before, even in Peru. I also had the opportunity to introduce a rare ethnic percussion instrument called a *checo*, which



Juan Medrano “Cotito” playing the *checo* drum onstage

is made from a large, hollowed-out gourd. Although it has traditionally been played only in one particular area of northern Peru called Zañá, I have tried to keep the instrument alive for future generations. In fact, during this tour of Japan, I received news from Peru that the *checo* has been designated a national treasure by the Peruvian government.

Min-On: How did you become a professional musician?

Cotito: My uncle was a musician, so I was interested in music from a young age. However, my mother was strongly against the idea of me becoming a professional musician, believing that there was no way to make money from playing music. So I went to college and studied journalism, but I never really gave up the idea of becoming a musician. And even after I became a professional musician, for a while I pretended otherwise to my mother! Now, however, she is proud of me!

Min-On: Please share with us your thoughts on the Min-On audiences.

Cotito: This is the first time I’ve performed in Japan. I had thought that Japanese people were always reserved and formal, so I was surprised when some people started dancing along with our performance. The audiences genuinely seemed to enjoy the music, and it was a great experience to witness people from another culture embracing Peruvian music. Japan is far from Peru, but I felt like I was playing music for my neighbors.

Flag-Bearers of a New Era of Tango

Fabio Hager Performs for the Min-On Tango Series

The Min-On Tango Series, which launched in 1970 with a concert by the internationally acclaimed Orquesta José Basso, has been credited with spearheading a tango boom in Japan. The series has featured nationwide Japan tours by leading tango artists, such as the Orquesta Osvaldo Pugliese and the Orquesta Mariano Mores, for over 40 years on an annual basis. More than 2,400 tango performances across Japan have to date attracted a combined audience of more than 3.5 million people.

This year marks the forty-third installment of the acclaimed *Min-On Tango Series*, and featured the celebrated bandoneon virtuoso Fabio Hager and his sextet. The nationwide 44-concert tour entitled *Dramatic Tango—the Flag-Bearer of a New Era* stopped at 38 cities across Japan from January through March. The Tokyo premiere at Nakano Sun Plaza Hall on February 9 was attended by a capacity audience of more than 2,000 people, including ambassadors from Armenia, Ghana, Jamaica and tango's homeland of Argentina, as well as by diplomats and distinguished guests from many other countries.

In addition to Hager on the bandoneon, the sextet comprises two violinists, Marco Press and Pablo Diego Ginzburg, cellist Julian Arellanos,

pianist Cesar Garcia, and contrabassist Emillio Longo—six of the finest young musicians in Buenos Aires today, who have all helped to open up a new era for tango artists in Argentina. They were joined on this tour by vocalist Noella Moncada, who made her professional debut in 2005 with the Orquesta El Arranque, when they toured Japan for the *Min-On Tango Series*.

The music accompanied the spellbinding dancing of three award-winning tango couples, Carla & Gaspar, Julia & Juan Manuel, and Manuela & Cristian. These magnificent performances of the finest Argentinian tango have mesmerized audiences at every venue. The two-month long tour will be concluded in Aomori Prefecture on March 23.



The Fabio Hager Sextet perform at Nakano Sun Plaza, Tokyo

Fabio Hager Dedicates Piece to Min-On Founder

On January 19, the day after their arrival in Japan, Maestro Fabio Hager and the members of his sextet, together with the group's featured dancers and singer, visited the Min-On Culture Center in Tokyo before departing for a two-month concert tour of Japan. They were greeted in the museum hall with warm and enthusiastic applause from Min-On President Hiroyasu Kobayashi and members of staff.

During a formal meeting, the bandoneon master, who has worked at several prestigious tango houses in Buenos Aires as an acclaimed musical director, composer and arranger, presented President Kobayashi with a framed score of his composition *Dramatico*. Maestro Hager wrote on the score sheet a dedication to Min-On founder Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, who

he has acknowledged as his greatest artistic influence.

In the course of the discussion, Mr. Hager recalled his unforgettable experiences performing for the *Min-On Tango Series* in the past, and expressed his heartfelt gratitude for Min-On's unflinching support for and promotion of tango in Japan for more than 40 years. "My heart is filled with a sense of deep appreciation for being able to share moments of my life and my beloved tango with Dr. Ikeda. I have composed this piece to express my debt of gratitude, and present it as a humble dedication to the Min-On founder... I am very proud of this piece, which is, I believe, my finest composition. I wrote this piece with my boundless feelings of appreciation and named it *Dramatico* from my

deep respect for Dr. Ikeda's convictions and his magnificent life."

The piece has been performed at each venue during the thirty-eight-city tour of Japan.



Fabio Hager (center left) presenting the score of *Dramatico*

Special Exhibition: The Romantic Era of Asakusa Opera at the Min-On Music Museum



Poster welcoming visitors to the Asakusa Opera exhibition

July 30, 2012 marks the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the Taisho (“period of great righteousness”) era in Japan. This all-too-brief period of Japanese history followed the chaotic post-revolutionary Meiji era and preceded the Showa era, when militarism and nationalism took hold. In contrast, the Taisho era saw the beginnings of a liberal movement known as the Taisho Democracy.

At the beginning of the Taisho era, after Japan had opened its doors to the West, people were exposed to Western culture and musical ideas; awareness grew of opera and operetta as artistic expressions of modern Western culture. Over time, these Western musical influences were developed into a unique form of Japanese operetta in Tokyo’s sole entertainment district of Asakusa. Thus, Asakusa Opera was born in the early 1900s, an expression of Taisho Romanticism. By the 1910s, many opera houses and theatrical companies had been established.

Both the language and context of this new form of entertainment were easily understood, and Asakusa Opera was accessible to ordinary citizens at affordable prices. It enjoyed a wide audience and rapidly achieved remarkable success. However, it lasted only until the Great Kanto Earthquake struck in 1923, after which it faded as if a fleeting dream of the Taisho era.

From January 1 through July 1, 2012, the Min-On Music Museum is featuring a special exhibition entitled *The Romantic Era of Asakusa Opera*, which introduces its history, scenes from the opera houses, stories of popular stars, their costumes, songs and performances, copies of scripts and scores, as well as original posters, flyers and programs. Through the media of panels, pictures, video and displays, visitors are invited to feel the excitement of the Asakusa Opera boom and experience the romanticism of the Taisho era.

20th Kansai Foreign Students Music Festival Held in Osaka

On December 4, 2011, 87 international students from 19 countries and regions studying at universities and colleges in the greater Kansai area gathered in the grand concert hall of the Osaka International House Foundation for the 20th Kansai Foreign Students Music Festival. The capacity audience of more than 800 people included distinguished guests from the Kansai area international community.

To promote intercultural understanding at a grassroots level, and to help create a worldwide network of friendship and goodwill among people from different countries around the world, Min-On has sponsored these international student festivals on an annual basis since 1989 alternatively at venues in Kyoto and Osaka.

At the beginning of the festival, Min-On President Kobayashi gave words of greeting and introduced a message from Min-On’s founder: “Music and art have the wonderful power to make it possible to transcend the barriers of language and nationality and to create solidarity among different peoples. Today’s music festival shall be a shining example as a microcosm of peaceful human society.”

Wearing colorful ethnic costumes, the students presented traditional and popular songs, as well as music and dance from their respective countries. For the finale, all participants came onstage together, expressing their joy and sense of achievement in making such a success of the collaborative performance, and contributing in a small way to bringing about lasting peace in the world.

After the festival, a student from Korea expressed his hopes: “It was a wonderful experience feeling that the world had become one. I am more confident that the world can be made a more peaceful place.” The deputy consul general of Thailand shared his impression, saying “It was so exciting to see students from different countries standing shoulder to shoulder on the same stage, creating a wonderful bond of friendship that will make the future brighter.”



Students from around the world onstage in Osaka

Asuka Gumi Celebrates 20th Anniversary with a Vigorous Drum Roll

Maidaiko Asuka Gumi, one of the most acclaimed professional Japanese traditional *taiko* drum troupes, triumphed in its twentieth anniversary concert at Nakano Sun Plaza Hall in Tokyo on December 9, 2011, following a yearlong nationwide commemorative tour. Since its formation in 1990 by Daigoro Asuka, a master of traditional Japanese dance and *taiko* performance, the Dancing Drum Troupe has performed hundreds of times annually for the past 20 years, both in Japan and overseas, including tours of France, Russia and Taiwan under the auspices of the Min-On Concert Association.

The troupe uniquely fuses powerful *taiko* drumming with the grace of Japanese traditional dance as well as traditional and modern instruments such as the

koto, *shakuhachi*, *shinobue* and synthesizer, successfully creating set pieces that offer a fresh interpretation of Japanese arts.

Besides solos on giant drums, powerful drum ensembles and rhythmical drum-kit solos, the concert also included performances incorporating theatrical elements from Japanese classical performing arts, such as *Kabuki*, *Noh* and *Kyogen*. Together, these elements very effectively expressed the Japanese soul and the formal beauty of the tradition.

The dynamic performances of Maidaiko Asuka Gumi were a testament to the 20-year career of these master drummers, and displayed their determination to push forward in new directions for the next 20 years. The concert ended with enthusiastic cheers and applause from the capacity audience.



Taiko drummer from Asuka Gumi

Superlative Entertainment from Mnozil Brass



Mnozil Brass

Mnozil Brass, an Austrian virtuoso brass ensemble septet, was brought back to Japan for an encore tour of 13 cities throughout Japan during the months of November and December in 2011.

The seven members of this versatile group are all graduates of the Vienna College of Music. They often played gigs at *Mnozil*, a pub opposite Vienna College, where the students used to meet to drink, play music and sing. Their performances started to draw unexpectedly large audiences to the pub, and so Mnozil Brass, a group of young musicians

bearing the name of the pub, was born.

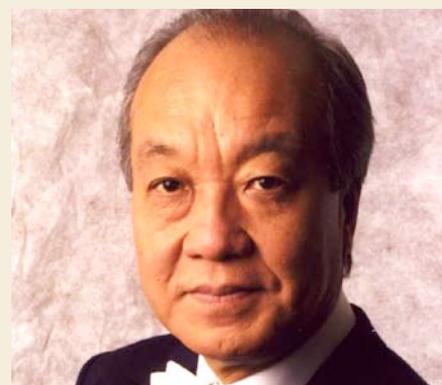
These days, wherever these seven musicians play in the world, they are similarly greeted with loud applause and laughter in equal measure, acknowledging their incredible blend of virtuoso musicianship and offbeat humor. At every venue in this Japan tour, capacity audiences shared the joy these magnificent seven create with their superlative entertainment, which crosses every stylistic border, from band music to orchestral brass, rock, jazz and—of course—terrific musical comedy.

Yuzo Toyama Conducts Annual Year-End Concert of Beethoven's No. 9

It may be a custom unique to Japan: Beethoven's Symphony No.9 is played annually during the year-end season by many orchestras and choral groups all over Japan, a custom that originated with the NHK Symphony Orchestra sometime in the 1940s in Tokyo.

The Min-On Concert Association also has long sponsored an annual year-end concert of Beethoven's popular Symphony No. 9, with its exuberant expressions of joy and love that have moved so many audiences celebrating a dramatic year-end and greeting a hopeful new year.

On December 19 at the famous Tokyo Bunka Kaikan concert hall, the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra performed Symphony No. 9, conducted by Yuzo Toyama, Permanent Conductor of the NHK Symphony Orchestra, who has also served as a chairperson of the panel of judges for Min-On's *Tokyo International Music Competition for Conducting* (the 16th competition of which will be held from October 28 through November 6, 2012). He celebrated his eightieth birthday in 2011, yet his vigorous conducting of *Ode to Joy* was an inspiration to the capacity audience, and won thunderous applause.



Yuzo Toyama

The Interplay of History, Geography and Culture

Interview with H.E. Juan Carlos Capuñay, Ambassador of the Republic of Peru



“ We are very proud of our cultural diversity—it is one of our country’s most precious assets.

Min-On: Thank you very much for your kind support for and presence at the recent concert *A New Legend of Peruvian Music*. Please share your impressions of the event.

Ambassador Capuñay: First of all, I would like to express my appreciation for the fact that many Japanese people love Peruvian music. However, I’m sure most Japanese people think of Peruvian music only as folk music from the Andes, such as the famous *El Condor Pasa*; not so many people know about Afro-Peruvian music, which has its roots in the black population of Peru.

About ten percent of the Peruvian population is descended from the Africans brought to Peru by the Spanish in the 1500s. But while Afro-Peruvian music originated during the colonial period, and has developed since then, it was little known—even in Peru—until the 1950s.

Thirty-four years ago, Min-On introduced Andean folk music to the Japanese people, and has now brought a group of Afro-Peruvian artists to Japan—probably the first time this has been done. What’s more, the combination of Andean and Afro-Peruvian genres is highly unusual, and rarely seen even in Peru. For this reason, we really appreciate Min-On bringing *A New Legend of Peruvian Music* to the stage in Japan.

Min-On: Please tell us about the roots of Peruvian culture.

Ambassador: Peru is a blend of cultures, and it is full of colorful expressions of that diversity. In terms of its migration history, it is

unique. The origins of our culture come from the indigenous peoples—the Quechua, for example, from the Andes, and the Incas. In the early 1500s, the Spanish came, bringing with them European culture, as well as the Africans I mentioned earlier, who in turn brought their own African culture.

In 1847, the first Chinese immigration came via Central America to Peru. They were

go to highland areas, you’ll see people wearing traditional dress that looks similar to traditional costume found in parts of Asia.

In terms of music, Andean music is tonally and rhythmically similar—and uses the same five-note scale—as some kinds of Asian music, in contrast to typical European music based on eight-note scales. I think this is one reason why many Japanese people love and even feel a certain nostalgia for Peruvian music.

Min-On: How has Peru’s geography affected its culture?

Ambassador: Peru’s geography is extremely varied, ranging from the tropical rain forests of the Amazon Basin to arid desert, and from low-lying coastal regions to the Andes highlands—the *sierra*. Cultural artifacts, such as buildings, food and clothes, vary by region and reflect the cultural uniqueness of each area. For example, the indigenous Inca people lived in the Andes and developed the Andean



Afro-Peruvian dance performance by El Colectivo Palenke

part of the famous California “49ers”, but ended up traveling as far as Peru in search of gold. In 1899, the first Japanese immigrants to America arrived in Peru on a ship called the *Sakuramaru* to take up agricultural work.

Of course, more cultural influences came later on from Europeans, and even from Eastern European countries. This mix of cultures can be seen in every aspect of our daily lives. Take cuisine, for example: Peruvians eat raw fish in dishes such as *ceviche* and *tiradito*, which are very similar to Japanese *sashimi* in the way the fish is cut and sliced, and clearly show the influence of Japanese immigrants. Another example: if you

highland culture even at an altitude of more than 6,000 meters. The Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu in the mountainous region is well known as the “Lost City of the Incas”, and the ancient mystic geoglyphs known as the Nazca Lines were created in the unique environment of the highland desert.

These famous historical sites are the typical images associated with Peruvian culture, attracting tourists from all over the world. But there are also many beautiful towns in the Southern part of the coastal region of Peru, such as Ica and Chincha Alta. The majority of Afro-Peruvians live in these cities, and have developed

their own unique coastal African traditions. This Afro-Peruvian culture is, however, still not well known outside of Peru itself.

Min-On: I understand that Peru emphasizes cultural education.

Ambassador: We try to educate children to value the cultural heritage from each area, and see it as part of Peruvian culture as a whole. We are very proud of our cultural diversity—it is one of our country's most precious assets—and we try to promote the passing on of these cultural assets to future generations. That's why in almost every school we have educational programs related to cultural heritage. For example, every schoolchild takes a cultural class—learning Afro-dance or an ethnic musical instrument, for example—for up to 10 years while they are at school. Our hope is that these children will grow to love and take pride in their own diverse culture. None of our cultural roots is denied: our origins are Andean, but we also talk about African culture, Asian culture and European culture without prejudice because these are the roots of Peruvian culture.

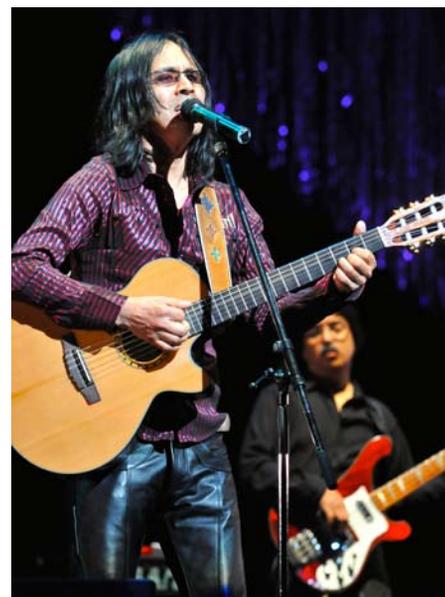
Min-On: As the ambassador of Peru to Japan, please share your impressions of working in Japan.

Ambassador: I feel very fortunate to be in Japan. This is actually the third time I have been

assigned here: the first time was in 1970; the second was during the 1990s—during the so-called 'bubble economy'; then I came here a third time after the economy began to deteriorate. Each period was very different, especially in terms of infrastructure and technological development. In the cities in particular everything has changed dramatically. However, the way Japanese people express friendship, love, and support toward other people has remained constant. In that respect, it feels the same as 37 years ago. To me, that is an aspect of Japanese culture to be respected and admired.

Min-On: Please share with us any comments or suggestions you have for the Min-On Concert Association.

Ambassador: I believe the activities of Min-On are important for us and for the world. What we are trying to do as an embassy is to establish closer relations with Japan. We aim to promote a relationship that goes beyond just the political and the economic; our aim is to build a relationship between our peoples and our societies. An economic relationship has its own particular channels; the relationship is sometimes good, sometimes bad. It is the same with political relationships. The only element that can provide a stable, long-lasting relationship is friendship between peoples.

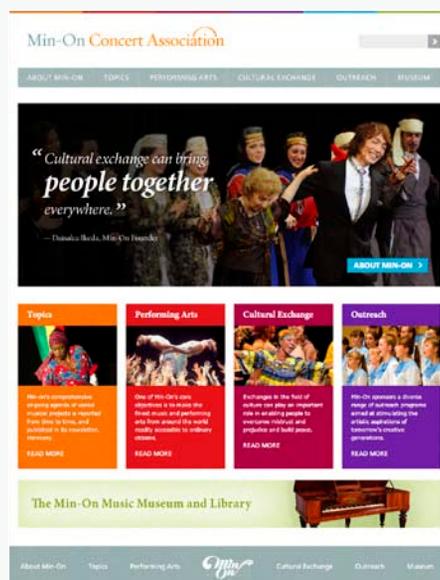


Modern Andean folk musician Mac Salvador

Min-On brings the cultures of different countries to Japan, thus creating a basis for consolidating people-to-people relationships. Once people learn about the culture and music of another society, that forms the basis for a closer link with that society. In that sense, Min-On has an important mission, not just with regard to the culture of Peru, but with regard to the cultures of countries all over the world.

From the Editor:

Min-On Launches Vibrant New Website: www.min-on.org



Next year will mark Min-On's 50th anniversary. When we look back over the past half-century, we are all astonished at the incredible history of achievements Min-On can claim, including cultural exchanges with no fewer than 104 countries and regions around the world.

One of the many projects to celebrate the anniversary year is the complete renewal of the Min-On English-language Website (www.min-on.org), which was launched in January. The site consists of six major sections—*About Min-On*, *Topics*, *Performing Arts*, *Cultural Exchange*, *Outreach*, and *Museum*—packed with information and pictures showing a half-century of Min-On Concert Association activities.

On the *Perspectives* page, which you can reach from the *About Min-On* section of

the main menu, you'll find quotes from the founder's writings on music and the arts, diversity and solidarity, cultural exchange, peace, and other subjects. These perspectives have served as the philosophical underpinning of the Min-On Concert Association for the last 50 years in fulfilling its cultural mission.

In the *Cultural Exchange* section of the site, an interactive map lets you explore the incredible history of cultural exchange events with more than 100 countries and regions throughout the world, each one helping to foster mutual understanding among different peoples in pursuit of a lasting peace in the world.

In the *Topics* section, you'll find news, features and interviews, as well as PDF downloads of the *Harmony* newsletter.

We sincerely hope you'll enjoy browsing and reading the new site at www.min-on.org.

From the Min-On Music Museum Collection



“Anton Walter” fortepiano from the Min-On Museum Collection

“Anton Walter” FortePiano 1795, Vienna, Austria

According to the Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Anton Walter was “the most famous Viennese piano maker of his time.” His pianos were highly regarded by Mozart, Beethoven and many other famous composers, and historical records show that Mozart bought a Walter piano around 1782, using it for composition as well as his highly successful piano concertos. The piano survives to this day and can be seen in the house of Mozart’s birth in Salzburg, Austria.

The Walter piano in the Min-On collection is also recognized as a cultural treasure, and is of the same style as the one Mozart owned, with the distinctive knee levers under the keyboard—the equivalent of the modern damper pedals. Only around twenty “Anton Walter” pianos of this style still exist in the world today, and only a few of those are playable. At the Min-On Music Museum, you can enjoy the original sound of the “Anton Walter” fortepiano as it was heard two hundred years ago in Mozart’s time.

The Min-On Concert Association Celebrates the People’s Music

The Min-On Concert Association was founded in 1963 by Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, president of the Soka Gakkai International, as a nonprofit, independent nondenominational organization to promote the global exchange of musical culture. Min-On aims to develop mutual understanding and respect among people of different races and nationalities. In 1965 it became an incorporated foundation, which is now supported by more than one million sustaining members nationwide. Min-On literally means “people’s music,” and its aim is to share the joy of music and to unite people through shared emotion, thus creating an ever-expanding circle of friendship among people around the world.

Today, Min-On sponsors some 1,100 performances each year, attracting a total audience of more than 1.5 million, and making available diverse music of high quality—from classical to modern, from popular to traditional—to as wide a range of music lovers as possible. Min-On also sponsors various musical programs, including free concerts in schools and the Tokyo International Music Competition to encourage the emotional development of young people and foster the growth of new talent.

Since its foundation, Min-On has hosted almost 75,000 cultural performances and concerts, with a total audience of more than 110 million. Through these various musical activities Min-On has successfully initiated cultural exchanges with 104 countries and regions around the world.

About The Min-On Music Museum and Music Library

The Min-On Culture Center is home to the Min-On Music Museum and Music Library. The collection includes more than 120,000 vinyl records, CDs, and DVDs, as well as 45,000 musical scores and 33,000 reference books and other materials, all of which are freely available. On display in the museum are

a number of antique harpsichords and classical pianos, various music boxes and gramophones, and a variety of ethnic instruments collected from around the world. The museum also hosts various special exhibitions and cultural activities on different musical themes. Entrance to the museum is free of charge.

Come and Visit Us!

Address: Min-On Culture Center
8 Shinano-machi, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, 160-8588
Tel: 03 5362 3400 **Fax:** 03 5362 3401

Exhibit and Shop

Open: 11:00-16:00 (Tuesday-Saturday)
10:00-17:00 (Sunday & public holidays)

Closed: Every Monday (If Monday is a public holiday, next day is closed)

Music Library

Open: 11:00-18:30 (Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday)
(Closed on public holidays)

Closed: August 1-15, Year-end / New Year



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