

harmony

Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association

No. 9

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The Shenyang Acrobatic Troupe of China



Award-winning Lion Dance, *Majestic Dignity*

This year, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Min-On Concert Association (founded in 1963), and in commemoration of the 35th anniversary of the conclusion of the Peace and Friendship Treaty between Japan and the People's Republic of China (1978), the Shenyang Acrobatic Troupe of China embarked on a nationwide 41-city tour of its production entitled *Sky Mirage*. The tour ran from March through May and was at the invitation of Min-On, but with the support of many other organizations, including the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo.

Based in the city of Shenyang in the Province of Liaoning, China, the Shenyang Acrobatic Troupe was founded on September 1, 1951. To date, the troupe has performed in over 70 countries and regions, and in more than 500 cities around the world, winning high acclaim with their breathtaking acrobatic performances. They have also been the recipient of a number of major awards in national and international acrobatic festivals, including three Gold Medals at the Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain in Paris.

Sky Mirage—the program presented for this Japan tour—was

choreographed by the troupe based on the theme of “shining illusions in a fantasy world high in the sky,” included award-winning performances of *Lion Dance*, *Kicking Bowls* (unicycle dancing), *Jumping on the Pole*, as well as the popular *Drum Juggling*, and many other comical acts and amazing acrobatic feats.

The three-month tour, which kicked off on March 1 in Kanagawa Prefecture, stopped at 44 locations around the country, attracting large audiences everywhere they went, from the northern island of Hokkaido to the southern island of Okinawa. On March 29, the Tokyo performance was held at Nakano Sun Plaza Hall in front of a capacity crowd of more than 2,000 people, including Ambassador Cheng Yonghua of the People's Republic of China and 14 other ambassadors and many distinguished guests from 29 countries. During a commemorative reception held for the guests and 60 members of the troupe after the performance, Ambassador Yonghua and Min-On President Kobayashi chatted with each and every member of the troupe, including children as young as six, encouraging them for their continued health and success.

In addition to the scheduled performances on the tour, the troupe visited areas affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake to deliver charity performances in Fukushima Prefecture on May 2, Iwate Prefecture on May 4, and Miyagi Prefecture on May 6. The invited audiences of people from the affected areas were encouraged by the highly creative performances that exuded energy and courage, and by the end, the venues were echoing with cheering voices and loud applause.

Although political relations between the two countries have been at a low ebb recently, these young cultural diplomats of the Shenyang Acrobatic Troupe successfully concluded their nationwide tour of Japan on May 29, a tremendous accomplishment of 84 engagements, strengthening the bonds of friendship that will surely bind the two nations closer together.



Ambassador Yonghua (far left) and Min-On President Kobayashi (far right) encourage young performers at the reception

Expressing the Energetic Life Force of Daily Living

Interview with Mr. An Ning, Tour Director of the Shenyang Acrobatic Troupe of China

Min-On: Thank you very much for staging such wonderful performances every day. Your acrobatics, called *zaji* in Chinese (*zatsugi* in Japanese)—literally, “miscellaneous skills”—are a unique and beautiful form of performing art, a form that is popular not only in China but also here in Japan and indeed all over the world.

Director An Ning: Yes, *zaji* is a form of traditional Chinese performing arts with a long history of more than 3,700 years. Broadly speaking, *zaji* encompasses various performance skills that originated from skills and activities used in everyday life, as well as physical feats and martial arts. In ancient times, it was called ‘miscellaneous art’ or ‘varied skills and performing arts’. For

example, the tableware used for performances of spinning plates and kicking bowls, as well as the chairs that are stacked up for the balancing acts, all come from the dining room at home. In a sense, *zaji* is an art form that expresses people's energetic life forces of daily living. *Sky Mirage* describes the beauty and power of the human body as a form of art.

Min-On: As a cultural envoy of China, the Troupe has promoted goodwill around the world.

Director: One of the first public hints of improved Sino-Japanese relations came in 1971 when the Chinese table tennis team visited Nagoya. Following that event, the Shenyang Acrobatic Troupe was dispatched to Japan for the first time. Also in 1972, seven years prior to the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and US, the Troupe toured America and was received by President Nixon and his wife at the White House. We are all proud of the fact that our performances could contribute to promoting friendly international relations and friendship exchange.

Min-On: It is an amazing contribution, visiting over 70 countries and regions all over the world, with such great success everywhere.

Director: It is only my personal opinion, but after visiting and performing in more than 500 cities around the world, I feel that this Japan tour is one of the most significant accomplishments for us, because we truly share the mission of the Min-On Concert Association—to promote international cultural exchange in order to deepen mutual understanding and friendship among all countries. Min-On founder Dr. Ikeda is a *lao peng you* (old best friend) to the people of China. We sincerely admire his dedication

of promoting long-standing friendships with people not only in China but all over the world, furthering the dream of global peace.

Min-On: Your Japan performances this time also commemorate the 35th anniversary of the conclusion of the Peace and Friendship Treaty between Japan and China.

Director: From the audience at every venue, we have directly experienced the sincere enthusiasm of people for better relations and stronger bonds of friendship. I am determined that our tour continues to deliver our best performances to fulfill our mission of being a bridge of friendship and trust between the people of our two countries.



Grand collaborative acrobatics entitled *Binding Forces*

Min-On Founder Awarded Honorary Directorship

On April 1, in the middle of the Japan tour, Mr. Ma Xiaoming, director of the Cultural Exchange Department of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, accompanied by one of the tour directors Mr. An Ning, as well as members of the Shenyang Acrobatic Troupe of China, visited the Min-On Culture Center in Tokyo to present the title of Honorary Director of the Troupe to Min-On founder Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, as well as the title of Honorary Artistic Advisor to the founder's wife, Mrs. Kaneko Ikeda. The presentation ceremony was held in Melody Hall, located within the Min-On Music Museum.

In attendance was Mr. Hiromasa Ikeda, Soka Gakkai Vice General Director, on behalf of his parents, Min-On President Hiroyasu Kobayashi, as well as staff and representatives of the membership. Official certificates of citation and commemorative gifts from the Troupe were presented during the ceremony. The acceptance message from the Min-On founder, read by Mr. Hiromasa Ikeda, took the form of a Chinese poem conveying his appreciation for the honorary title. He went on to praise the troupe's consistent and dedicated efforts toward global peace, an aim that was encouraged by the late Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai.

After listening to the message, the



Members of the Troupe present the award at Min-On's Melody Hall

Troupe members applauded warmly with smiles and pride evident in their faces.

Young Conductors Make Successful Debuts at Gala Concert Series



Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra performs under the baton of Maja Metelska from Poland

An early spring series of Gala Concerts for the winners of the 16th Tokyo International Competition for Conducting was held in Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka in March. The Competition, held last year by the Min-On Concert Association in cooperation with the Association of Japanese Symphony Orchestras, attracted 180 talented young people from 29

countries and regions.

After the document and video reviews by the judging panel, 24 applicants from nine different countries and regions participated in the primary round of the competition, held last autumn in Tokyo. Although no one took first, second or third prizes after the final round held on November 4, 2012, the special Hideo

Saito Award went to Ms. Maja Metelska, from Poland; the Audience Award went to Ms. Mayana Ishizaki, from Japan; and the Encouragement Award was presented to Ms. Yuko Tanaka, also from Japan. All three finalists were awarded Honorable Mentions and were given the opportunity to appear at the Gala Concert series.

The first of the concerts, on March 1 in Tokyo, featured the successful debuts of the three young conductors in front of a public audience at the majestic Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall. First on stage was Yuko Tanaka conducting, R. Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration, Op.24*, followed by Mayana Ishizaki conducting Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Overture—Fantasy*. Finally, Maja Metelska took the baton for Jean Sibelius: *Symphony No. 1 in E minor Op. 39* played by the internationally acclaimed Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra.

In each of the three cities, the audience warmly applauded the three young conductors equally, celebrating their promising future career in conducting.

Discovering the Soul of Shoka Songs at the Min-On Music Museum

The Min-On Music Museum periodically organizes cultural lectures, workshops and mini concerts along with occasional special exhibitions in the museum as its public service activities to promote appreciation for music culture.

As part of these public service activities, a pair of vocalists known as Ca et La gave a talk and vocal concert entitled *Calling on Souls of Japanese Shoka* at the Min-On Culture Center in Tokyo on the Saturday afternoon of March 30. The event accompanied a special exhibition entitled *Recalling Nostalgic Melodies of Japanese Shoka Songs* held at the music museum during the first quarter of this year.

The name *Ca et La* means 'here and there' in French and alludes to the fact that both Yuriko Kikuchi (vocals) and Tomoko Takahashi (piano and vocals) have assembled a repertoire of songs in different genres from 'here and there', such as *doyou*—children's songs, *minyo*—folk songs, and *kayokyoku*—popular songs. Their



Shoka melodies evoking the atmosphere of a school music classroom

aim is to share the soul of music with people everywhere—just as they did with the audience at the Museum Hall in the Culture Center.

After their concert, many audience members commented that Ca et La's sincere

talk and clear vocal performance of nostalgic *Shoka* songs transported them back to their school days and recalled fun memories of singing the songs together with parents, teachers, and old friends."

Colombian Teens Bring the Unique Spirit of Chirimía to Japan

On May 28 in Tokyo, teenage members of the music group Chirimía, accompanied by Embassy officials of the Republic of Colombia, paid a courtesy visit to the Min-On Culture Center.

Chirimía groups come primarily from the Chocó department in Colombia's Northern Pacific region, where 99% of the population is Afro-Colombian. Traditional Chirimía tunes are played on European brass instruments and clarinets accompanied by regional drums and cymbals. Although the province struggles with economic hardship and social difficulties, many children join Chirimía bands at school and learn the distinctive repertory of music.

For this Japan tour, under the Colombian government's "Give a Chance to Children" initiative, 10 boys and girls, with an average age of 15, were selected to represent Chirimías in the Chocó and brought to Japan for the purposes of cultural exchange with Japanese children in the areas affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. Several friendship concerts were successfully held in the Tohoku Region, attended by Ambassador Patricia Cardenas and other Embassy officials, together with the local children.

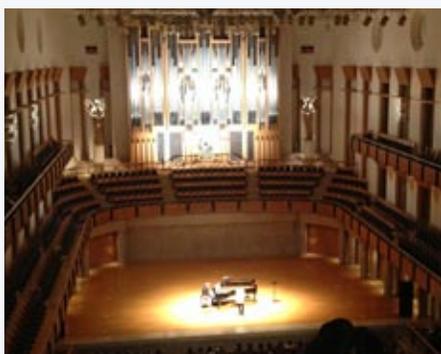
At the Min-On Music Museum, members of the band enjoyed looking at the ethnic instruments on display, and listened to music



Members of the Chirimía band perform at Min-On Culture Center

played on some of the antique fortepianos in the collection. They then put on an impromptu performance of their own, which was warmly received by staff and visitors present in the Museum's Melody Hall.

Pipe Organ Recital Echoes in the Majestic Ark Hall



Box-shaped structure of the Muse Ark Hall creates rich acoustics for the pipe organ

On the evening of February 14 at the Tokorozawa Muse Ark Hall in Saitama Prefecture, Japanese organist Minako Tsukatani gave a unique pipe organ recital in collaboration with acclaimed conductor and pianist Hiroshi Aoshima, trumpeter Hiroki Yamakawa, and tenor vocalist Tsutomu Ono.

The pipe organ is the grandest musical instrument in size and scope. They were first built as far back as the 14th century, and were considered to be among the most complex mechanical creations prior to the Industrial Revolution.

The majestic Muse Ark Hall boasts a pipe

organ comprised of 5,563 pipes in multiple ranks of differing timbre, pitch and loudness that the player can employ singly or in combination through the use of 75 separate controls called stops.

The joint performance was conducted by Aoshima, who was on stage playing the piano, while Tsukatani played the pipe organ on the balcony above the stage, following the conductor by means of a mirror placed beside her keyboard. Despite this unusual and difficult arrangement, they elegantly performed a wide variety of music from classical and modern pieces to popular Japanese Shoka songs.

K-Broadway Presents World-Class Dance Performances in Japan

Min-On sponsored a special dance production entitled *K-Broadway—Dance for Smiles* featuring the top dancers and alumni of the Broadway Dance Center, as well as special guest artist Hideboh, an internationally acclaimed tap-dancer. The performance was held on February 19 at the Kamakura Art Theater in Kanagawa prefecture and on February 22 in Tokyo.

The K-Broadway Dance Company started producing shows in 1984 when its umbrella institution, the Broadway Dance Center (BDC), was established with the aim of producing versatile performances

and fostering world-class dancers in Japan. To date, the company has concluded 41 performance tours in many countries around the world, earning a solid reputation within the global dance community for their authentic performing arts skills.

The first half of this special performance paid tribute to the memory of the late Naoki Kurita, a great choreographer and one of the founders of the BDC and K-Broadway. In the second half, a number of great choreographers from the company created brilliance onstage with a variety of dance styles. Their versatile and dynamic performances were



Broadway-style performance in Tokyo

an inspiration to the many young aspiring dancers among the enthusiastic audience at the Nakano Sun Plaza Hall.

Music a Source of Happiness in Colombia

Interview with H.E. Patricia Cardenas, Ambassador of Colombia



“It is very interesting to see how culture, and specifically music, has been pointed out as one of the reasons why Colombia can be considered the happiest nation on the planet.

Min-On: Thank you so much for your consistent support and frequent participation in Min-On’s activities. Could you tell us more about the unique aspects of Colombia, especially its culture, music and performing arts, and also what you are personally proud of as Ambassador of Colombia to Japan.

Ambassador Cardenas: First of all, I would like to extend a special greeting to all the readers of *Harmony*. It is an excellent opportunity for me to be able to share various aspects of Colombia, and particularly our rich cultural heritage.

To understand the unique richness of Colombia, we have to look back at our history. A diversity of cultures inhabited what is now Colombia before the arrival of the Spaniards. There were numerous indigenous pre-Colombian civilizations in Latin America. One of the most distinctive legends that frames the pre-Hispanic era is El Dorado—the mythical city of gold. The legend derives from a ceremony carried out by the indigenous Muisca tribe involving a ritual that took place on the shores of Lake Guatavita in which precious treasures of gold and emeralds were thrown into the lake as offerings to a god that lived under the water. The Gold Museum in Bogota houses the largest and most extraordinary collection of these pre-Colombian gold artifacts in the world, as well as pottery and textiles. We were delighted that the *Legendary Treasures of El Dorado* exhibition was held at Min-On’s affiliated institution, the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, in 1990, and those gold artifacts and some of the world’s biggest emeralds were on display for the first time in Japan.

The Spaniards arrived with the Conquest bringing slaves with them from Africa. Then in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, immigrants from other European countries, as well as from the Middle East and Asia, arrived and settled. For this reason, Colombia is a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation, where each region has its own distinct characteristics that makes it different from all the others. Colombian culture—from its performing arts to its cuisine, architecture, fine arts, literature, film and photography—is an amalgam of European, African and indigenous influences.

Given such rich diversity, there are always reasons to celebrate! We have 110 festivals, 46 fairs, 32 beauty contests and five carnivals every year. Colombia is a country of festivity. We have been proud to be able to show to Japanese audiences this rich variety of Colombian culture through concerts, exhibitions and dance performances from different regions. Those occasions have been precious opportunities to share our values and our spirit as a country through our music. I am always looking for new

opportunities to promote Colombia and its immense cultural heritage.

Min-On: When we see Your Excellency at Min-On concerts, you seem to genuinely enjoy the music and performances from different countries. Please share with us your thoughts on the importance of music and art in people’s lives.

Ambassador: I really love listening to music and watching various performances. I don’t want to miss any of those wonderful concerts by artists invited from around the world. Min-On’s ability to select the best performers from each country to represent their musical culture and the quality of the performances are always superb.

There is no doubt that music has the power to positively affect people’s behavior and attitude, and that it can be an instrument of healing and encouragement capable of bringing joy to people even in times of sadness. The fact that music can contribute to a state of wellbeing in its most fundamental sense has been recognized by international studies and polls. It is very interesting to see how culture—and specifically music—has been identified as one of the reasons why Colombia is considered by some to be the happiest nation on the planet. This was one of the conclusions of *The Global Barometer of Hope and Happiness*, a poll by WIN/Gallup International Association. According to this survey, inhabitants of Colombia are almost twice as happy as the global average, and one of the reasons for this is the presence of music and art in people’s daily lives.



Performance of the Barranquilla Carnival in 1990

For us, music is a valuable tool to connect people and cultures. Indeed, music has been one of the ways in which we have been able to establish a closer relationship with Japan.

Min-On: For the past 50 years, based on its founding principles, Min-On has promoted cultural exchange with different countries around the world. Please share your experiences with and impressions of Min-On, as well as your thoughts on the value of those cultural exchange activities.

Ambassador: There is no doubt that Min-On plays an important role in the area of cultural exchange. Every time I attend a cultural activity, I feel not only glad but also thankful, because Min-On is truly creating opportunities for different nations to share with Japan their expressions of musical culture.

Many people don't know much about Colombia, and often people's impression of the country is simplistic or stereotypical. However, once people have the opportunity to attend a cultural performance, they tend to reassess their assumptions about Colombia. They discover that there is wealth of culture in the country, and they feel the distance lessen. Min-On has made a great contribution to the understanding of our country in Japan, its uniqueness and cultural diversity.



Performance of the Ballet Folklórico Nacional de Colombia in 1988

We are grateful to have received the support of Min-On on many occasions in the past. For instance, in 1988, Min-On invited the Ballet Folklórico Nacional de Colombia for a tour of 23 performances around Japan. Min-On also supported a special performance by Leonor Gonzalez Mina in 1990 as well as the Barranquilla Carnival in the context of former President Andres Pastrana's visit to Japan in 1999.

Besides these invitations from Min-On, we have also had the opportunity to bring various performers to Japan, who together have contributed to greater mutual understanding between our nations. These include the Ballet de Antioquia, which performs Colombian traditional dances at the highest professional levels; Bahia, a marimba group from the Pacific Region of Colombia; and El Colegio del

Cuerpo, a Cartagena dance school that focuses on dance as a way to tackle social problems.

Other artists that have performed recently are Maria Mulata, who plays traditional bullerengue rhythms of the Caribbean; Tiple artists, Pedro Neland Richardo Martinez; Salsa performers, Calambuco, and salsa dancers, Swing Latino, among others.

Through each one of these cultural showcases, we have been able to reiterate how music is truly an excellent way to consolidate our ties.

People can spontaneously accept new and different cultures by experiencing such performances in person. In that sense, cultural exchange is a key element to fostering mutual understanding, allowing people to feel closer and respect each other, bringing us one step closer to peace around the world.

I look forward to working together with Min-On again in the future to share the immense cultural heritage of Colombia with Japanese audiences, and to exploring cutting-edge artistic expression. A good example is the internationally acclaimed group Delirio, a unique and beautiful Cali-style salsa show with a combination of fast-paced, exotic footwork and breathtaking circus-like performance. I sincerely hope this will further strengthen the bonds of friendship that bind Japan and Colombia.

From the Editor: A Shared Mission to Promote Cultural Exchange

» For the interview with Ambassador Cardenas, we visited her office at the Embassy of the Republic of Colombia in Tokyo. While talking about indigenous cultures of Colombia in the pre-Hispanic period, she showed us a miniature replica of a gold artifact from El Dorado and mentioned the success of *Colombian Gold Exhibition: Legendary Treasures of El Dorado* held in 1990 at Tokyo Fuji Art Museum with the full support and cooperation of the Colombian government.

» Founded by Dr. Ikeda under the motto of "A museum that creates bridges around the world," the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum (TFAM) is one of our affiliated institutions. TFAM has sponsored various exhibitions promoting cultural exchange that bring the finest artistic treasures of the world to Japan and to other countries. In appreciation of the successful Gold Exhibition in Tokyo, TFAM brought its own collection of Japanese art treasures to Colombia and opened a special exhibition entitled *Eternal Treasures of Japanese*

Culture: Beauty and Spirit of Japan at the National Museum in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1993. At the official invitation of former President César Gaviria Trujillo and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Colombia, the Founder visited Colombia for the first time. This year marks the 20th anniversary of this significant cultural exchange.

» Min-On and TFAM share the same mission of promoting cultural exchange, the value of which was explained by the Founder in these terms: "The basis of genuine world peace will be formed by the fostering of a mutual understanding through a grass-roots exchange that transcends distinctions of race, nation and ideology. To this end, exchanges in art and culture will be indispensable. Music, dance and works of art occupy a dimension that transcends borders. While they may be distinctively ethnic in flavor, they also have a quality that makes them universally accessible. This quality is what prompts me to consider promoting exchange in music and the arts."

From the Min-On Music Museum Collection



Min-On's "Johann Fritz" fortepiano

"Johann Fritz" Forteplano 1800, Vienna, Austria

Very little is known about Johann Fritz, despite the fact that he seems to have been a fairly prolific builder, with a number of his instruments surviving to this day. Many aspects of his work suggest that he learned the manufacture of fortepianos in Anton Walter's workshop in Vienna, Austria.

This Viennese fortepiano, built by Johann Fritz and dating from around 1800, was owned by Count Keglevicz's daughter Barbara, who was one of Beethoven's pupils. Beethoven himself therefore possibly played the piano during her lessons.

It looks surprisingly fragile, with beautiful gilded decorations, and yet can produce a tremendous sound. Uniquely, it has five pedals, including a so-called "Turkish Pedal" to trigger a mechanism of bells, cymbals and drums.

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 105 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!

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8 Shinano-machi, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, 160-8588
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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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