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## Swedish A Cappella Enchants Audiences Across Japan

People who hear a conversation in Swedish for the first time often comment that the language is very melodic with an almost sing-song quality. Indeed, Sweden is a country of singers—some statistics indicate that among a population of 9 million people, some 600,000 belong to choral groups of one sort or another.

The Svanholm Singers is an extraordinary, award-winning male a cappella group named after Set Svanholm, the world famous opera tenor and father of Eva Svanholm Bolin, the founder and the first conductor of the choir. Since its formation in 1998, the group has won numerous awards at domestic and international choir competitions and has gained a wonderful reputation as one of the brightest stars in this nation of choirs.

With the support of the embassy of the Kingdom of Sweden, Min-On invited the 21 talented male singers and its female conductor Sofia Söderberg Eberhard to Japan in December 2013 for their fifth tour of the country. With a repertoire spanning a wide variety of folk songs from the Scandinavian and the Baltic States as well as from the Americas and Japan, the choir showcased performances that demonstrated not only virtuosity of technique but also great sensitivity, enchanting and inspiring audiences at each venue in the 12 cities across Japan in the depths of winter.

### Interview with Ms. Sofia Söderberg Eberhard, conductor of the Svanholm Singers

**Min-On: A cappella is originally music performed 'in the style of the chapel', but there are now a variety of contemporary a cappella styles. What is the appeal of a cappella?**

**Sofia:** What fascinates me about a cappella is that it's music made by nothing more than the human voice. If you want to play some musical instrument in an orchestra, you have to start learning the instrument when you're still a child, which means your parents need to buy an instrument, pay for lessons, and generally provide a lot of support. But the voice—itself a beautiful musical instrument—is something we are all born with. Singing is probably the first music that humankind made and experienced; the voice was the first musical instrument—and one that is given equally to all human beings, regardless of their other differences. Vocal music is therefore particularly good at connecting people and touching people more naturally than other musical instruments are able to. When I'm playing a musical instrument—in my case, the cello—I think there's always a certain distance between the player and the audience created by the instrument itself. But when you sing with your voice alone, there's a spontaneous and direct connection with the audience. Everybody has the possibility

to make music with his or her own voice, and everyone can experience the shared feeling of communicating with each other through music. This simple fact is what attracts me to a cappella.

What's more, even if you don't share the same language, you can still communicate with your voice through music. For example, if I speak in Swedish here in Japan, probably no one would understand anything I was trying to communicate. But if I sing a song in Swedish, all of a sudden it means something to Japanese people—even though they don't understand the words. I have often experienced this unique power of music through a cappella. And this is one reason why I wanted to study and make my career in music.

I am convinced that the power of music is even greater than most people realize. Music is something that virtually everyone in the world has experienced; it is such a fundamental part of our lives. Nowadays, with computers and the Internet, with television and radio, music is everywhere. But as an artist, I believe we still have to make that extra effort to perform face-to-face with the audience. That immediacy is something very special, and that is why I feel very lucky to be part of these a cappella performances.



## Forty-fifth Installment of Min-On Tango Series Gets Underway

Every year since Min-On launched the *Min-On Tango Series* in 1970, a number of internationally renowned tango artists have been invited to Japan from Argentina and other countries. To date, more than 2,400 Min-On tango performances have been held, attracting a combined audience of more than 3.6 million people, establishing the series as one of the most prestigious tango events in Japan.

Meanwhile, in Argentina, Min-On established the Min-On Award in 2004 to be presented to winners of the annual international tango festival and competition *The Tango Buenos Aires*. Winners are given the opportunity of participating in a performance tour of the Min-On Tango Series in Japan. Indeed, among international tango artists, winning the Min-On Award is now considered as a ticket to success in the world of professional tango. In this way, Min-On has contributed to friendly relations between Japan and Argentina, as well as the popularity of tango culture around the world for more than 40 years.

Early in the New Year, the 45th installment of the acclaimed annual series got underway for a two-month-long nationwide tour of 29 cities across Japan. Entitled *Dramatic Tango in 2014—The Melodies Echo Eternally*, the tour's first stop on January 24 was Min-On's regular Tokyo venue, the Nakano Sun Plaza Hall,



The Grecos Tango Orquesta and award-winning dancers deliver the latest installment of dramatic tango

which hosted a capacity audience, including ambassadors and diplomats from six Latin American countries.

The premiere featured the Grecos Tango Orquesta, a leading orchestra in the contemporary tango scene made up of young virtuoso musicians, accompanied by award-winning dancers such as Florencia & Guido—Min-On Award recipients at the 2013 International Tango Competition. With

an average age of just 31, the band members are the very embodiment of youthful energy and passionate rhythm, and together with the three couples of award-winning dancers, they delivered a moving performance of authentically dramatic tango. Their reward was loud applause and enthusiastic cheers after each of the two-dozen or so classical, popular and original tango pieces that made up the concert.

## Emiliano Greco Dedicates *Melodia Permanete* to Min-On Founder

On January 21, before embarking on their nationwide tour, fourteen musicians and dancers from the Grecos Tango Orquesta—led by the young master pianist Emiliano Greco and his younger brother Lautaro, a virtuoso bandoneonist—visited the Min-On Culture Center in Tokyo. After a warm welcome by the entire Min-On staff in the Grand Lobby of the Center, President Hiroyasu Kobayashi and board members of the Min-On Concert Association greeted them in the reception room. During a formal meeting, maestro Emiliano Greco expressed his heartfelt gratitude for Min-On's invitation to Japan and presented a framed score of his original composition *Melodia Permanete* (*Melody in Eternity*). "I have deeply admired and empathized with Dr. Ikeda's idea of promoting global exchange in music for the cause of world peace," Emiliano explained, "and I am very proud to be a part of the cultural movement he founded. The path toward peace is far from uneventful, yet we must all continue our progress along that path. I composed this piece in humble dedication to Min-On founder Dr. Daisaku Ikeda for his long-standing leadership of and contribution to the struggle for peace and our path to peace in eternity." He added, "I will perform this



Emiliano (center right) and Lautaro Greco (center left) present the score dedicated to the Founder

piece at each venue throughout the tour with my deepest gratitude and conviction to follow the path."

## Koto Sounds the Celebration of a New Year

The koto is considered a national musical instrument of Japan. It has 13 strings that are strung over 13 movable bridges along the width of the wooden body, which is some six feet long. Its origins can be traced back to the Chinese *zheng*, which was first introduced to Japan in the early Nara Period (710-784). Although there was not much evolution of the instrument itself for many centuries, at the beginning of the Meiji Period (1868-1912) when western music was introduced to Japan, a blind koto player and composer named Michio Miyagi contributed significantly to the instrument's evolution by combining western music and traditional koto music in

his compositions. Since Miyagi's time, many composers, such as Tadao Sawai, have written and performed works that continue to advance the instrument. And Sawai's widow Kazue Sawai, who as a child was Miyagi's favored disciple, together with her son Hikaru Sawai, have been the main driving force behind the internationalization and modernization of the koto.

Of all the koto music Miyagi composed, *Haru no Umi* (*Spring Sea*) is probably the most popular and well-known, and it is typically played to welcome each New Year in Japan. On January 13, Min-On sponsored a koto recital by the Sawai Koto Institute at the



Yomiuri Hall in Tokyo. The capacity audience enjoyed and celebrated the New Year with the serene sounds of the koto ensemble, like a calm spring sea.

## The Fifth Minyo Festival Inspires Hometown Nostalgia

Japanese people who were born and raised in outlying areas of Japan outside of the major metropolitan areas typically have a particular song that is familiar to everyone from that area,

and on hearing it usually gives rise to nostalgic feelings for their hometown. *Minyo* is a genre of traditional Japanese folk music with distinct styles and songs depending on the area. The songs are typically sung with accompaniment on traditional Japanese instruments such as the *shamisen* (three-stringed instrument), the *shakuhachi* (vertical bamboo flute) and the *shinobue* (Japanese transverse flute).

Min-On has contributed to the perpetuation and development of traditional Japanese performing arts through sponsorship of a variety of unique and ambitious programs for many years.

The Fifth Annual Minyo Festival was held at

Nakano Sun Plaza Hall in Tokyo on December 10, a short time before people generally return to their hometowns for the New Year vacation. A total of 16 top singers and nine master musicians in the genre of *minyo* as well as Japanese dance troupe Wakatake were divided into two teams and their performance of sixteen *minyo* songs from different areas were delivered onstage in the style of a competition between Eastern and Western Japan. The capacity audience acted as judges, casting their votes by enthusiastically cheering and applauding their favorite songs. The team of Western Japan were thus chosen to receive the winner's flag after the finale.



## Min-On Salon Concert Held at Melody Hall

A salon is a comfortable, intimate space perfect for small concerts and talks, or for the reception of important guests. Indeed, concerts of exquisite chamber music were often held in salons, and hence the genre of European salon music was born.

The Min-On Culture Center in Shinanomachi, Tokyo houses the Min-On Music Museum, and Melody Hall, its grand foyer, functions as a multi-purpose salon. Last year, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of its founding, Min-On initiated a new series of free concerts entitled *Min-On Music Museum Salon Concerts* that were staged in the Melody Hall. On the Saturday afternoon of February 2, the Music Museum sponsored

the second installment of the Salon Concert Series, featuring a performance of upcoming Japanese percussionist duo Chihiro Osawa and Keiko Masaki, who delivered an exquisite marimba performance and afterward gave a



talk explaining the instrument.

For the past half century, Min-On has been a mainstay in the three areas of international cultural exchange, concert promotion and public outreach. Of these three, the greatest contributions have been in the field of public outreach—not only in providing admission-free opportunities to experience music in order to raise the general level of music appreciation in Japan but also in nurturing musicians and artists and enabling them to present their finest works and performances at home and abroad. The Min-On Salon Concert will continue to be held every other month throughout the year as part of the outreach program of the Min-On Music Museum.

## Serene Sounds of the Guzheng Offers Tranquil Afternoon

"Even in the deepest quiet of a snowy day, there was a resonance within the stillness. I was staring at the falling snow from a window and spontaneously composed this piece for my *guzheng*." With these words, Jiang Xiaoqing, an internationally acclaimed player of the *guzheng* (also known as the Chinese zither), introduced her original composition entitled *Fuyu-Yuki (The Winter's Snows)* before the graceful sound of the guzheng transported audiences to an exquisitely serene place.

On January 16, a unique recital by the guzheng master, accompanied by Chinese xylophone master Ma Ping and Japanese classical pianist Rie Nishimoto, was held at

a sold-out Yokohama Kanai Hall. A varied program ranging from traditional and classical to popular and New Age music offered the



audience a tranquil afternoon in the harbor city.

Born in Beijing, Jiang Xiaoqing was tutored by acclaimed guzheng players from the age of eight and had mastered the five major performance styles at The Chinese National Central Conservatory of Music by the age of fifteen. In Japan, she joined Ryuichi Sakamoto on the soundtrack for *The Last Emperor*, which went on to win an Academy Award for music. Since then, she has cemented her reputation as one of today's most elegant Chinese guzheng virtuosi plying concerts around the world. Min-On has sponsored several of her exceptionally beautiful performances throughout Japan.

## Divas of Asia Create Powerful Onstage Presence

The legendary diva of Asia, Ouyang Feifei, began her career in Taipei in 1967; she came to Japan in 1971 and in the same year scored a



Cheuni (left) and Ouyang Feifei (right)

number one hit with her debut single entitled *Ame no Midousuji (Rainy Avenue of Midosuji)*, which sold more than a million copies. It was the first time a foreign artist from Asia had topped the Weekly Oricon chart and the record earned her the Newcomers Prize at the 1971 Japan Record Awards. Since then, she has been a mainstay not only of Japan's music scene, but also that of Taiwan, Hong Kong and several other Asian countries, enjoying an international reputation as the Taiwanese-born "Disco Queen" of Japan.

Another well-known diva of Asia, Cheuni, came to Japan from Korea in 1998 having already won numerous industry awards there.

Just a year after arriving in Japan, she had her first hit with the song *Twilight Tokyo* and received the Newcomers Prize at the 2000 Japan Record Awards.

On the Sunday afternoon of January 19 at Nakano Sun Plaza Hall in Tokyo, Min-On presented a special joint performance of Ouyang Feifei and Cheuni entitled *A Dream Matchup of Asian Divas*. The 2,000-strong audience, which included many baby-boomers who grew up listening to Feifei, were treated to a spectacular stage set and lighting, while the powerful presence of the concert goddesses on stage radiated infectious enthusiasm throughout the packed venue.

## Audience Invited to the Cinematic Piano Paradise of Jacob Koller

Listening to the soundtrack album of a memorable movie enables those who saw the movie to recall and implicitly re-experience scenes from the film. As *Time Goes By* from the romantic scene in the movie *Casablanca* released in 1942, and Henry Mancini's *Moon River* from the 1961 masterpiece *Breakfast At Tiffany's*, as well as *I Dreamed a Dream* sung by Anne Hathaway in the recent hit movie *Les Miserables* are all timeless masterpieces of the soundtrack genre.

American jazz pianist Jacob Koller began studying classical piano at the age of four and had won more than 10 classical piano competitions before entering high school. While at high school, he developed a passion

for jazz and improvisation and began working professionally in Phoenix, Arizona from the age of 14. Koller came to Japan in 2009 and his musical genius blossomed, producing lush arrangements of various genres of music, but especially music for the screen. These arrangements formed the basis of a series of albums entitled *Cinematic Piano Paradise*.

On the Friday afternoon of January 31, accompanied by his special acoustic jazz ensemble—Dennis Frehse on drums, Patrick Glynn on bass, Maiko on violin and Orié Hirayama on cello as well as a guest vocalist Miyuki Hatakeyama, Jacob Koller invited the audience to share his cinematic piano paradise at the Yokohama Kanai Hall. Providing a

commentary on the movies in fluent Japanese alongside beautiful renditions of various soundtracks, Koller recreated for the audience scenes of romantic glamour from cinematic masterpieces old and new.





# Music is Central to Our Life and to Our Culture

Interview with H. E. Ruth Kahanoff, Ambassador of Israel



“ Israel is home to a very rich culture that has been fertilized by many different influences from around the world, and also by both history and modernity.

**Min-On:** Min-On has proudly promoted the global exchange of musical culture over many years. Indeed, Min-On invited the internationally acclaimed pianist Frank Pelleg from the State of Israel back in 1965, marking Min-On’s first ever cultural exchange concert with a foreign country. We are deeply appreciative of that history and your nation’s continuous support of Min-On since then.

**Ambassador Kahanoff:** I received your book, *50 Years of Min-On Concert Association*, and have been very impressed reading about all the activities Min-On has organized over the years—including quite a few involving Israel. And we are very happy to continue our association with Min-On. I think cultural exchanges between countries in general are very important, and I believe they are especially meaningful between Israel and Japan because both countries possess a rich culture, a long history and a wealth of cultural heritage.

Through cultural exchanges, we are able to learn about each other and increase mutual understanding. Last year, we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries. The Israeli embassy has organized a series of cultural events in Japan that will continue throughout this year and in the years to come.

**Min-On:** We are always deeply impressed by the quality of artists from Israel. The girls of the Efroni Choir, for instance, who delivered brilliant performances of courageous songs in harmony and showed us the distinctive ethnic character of Israel during their two Japan tours with Min-On. What do you see as the unique aspects of Israeli culture?

**Ambassador:** Israeli culture is something very special. Like Japanese culture, Jewish culture is very old; yet at the same time, Israel is a young country, so its culture combines both traditional elements from its long history as well as modern elements. The combination of old and new has really created something very unique in Israel.

But Israel is also an immigrant society. We have welcomed waves of Jewish immigrants from all over the world—from countries in the Middle East, from Eastern and Western Europe, from Latin America, from Ethiopia, and so on. These immigrants brought with them their own cultural influences and unique traditions, which in turn blended with Israeli culture. We also have local Arab populations, who have their own special cultural attributes. The result is a very rich culture that has been fertilized by many different influences from around the world, and also by both history and modernity.

Music, of course, is very special and always very important for Jewish people. I think it’s no coincidence that many world famous composers, musicians, and artists are of Jewish origin. In particular, the violin is considered a very Jewish instrument, and many leading violinists around the world are Jewish. It is a small instrument, so you can take it with you wherever you go. Unfortunately, over the course of history, Jews have had to move from place to place, but because the violin is a very small instrument, it could always be taken with them. I think also that the violin is an especially expressive instrument that can really communicate the soul and emotion of the player—and that too is very Jewish.

About 20 years ago, Israel received the whole wave of about a million people when the former Soviet Union collapsed. Among them were many musicians who have greatly contributed to the musical culture of our country with their enthusiasm.



The Efroni Choir from Israel performing in Tokyo in 1995

We have a variety of wonderful musical culture: classical music, of course, but also modern music, jazz, and *klezmer*—traditional Jewish music that is sometimes called Jewish soul music. Music, in general, is part of daily life—for both joyous occasions and for sad ones—and music is also important in chanting and for prayers. In other words, music is central to our life and to our culture.

**Min-On:** The virtuoso violinist Yehudi Menuhin is also of Jewish origin. When he visited Tokyo, he and the Min-On Founder discussed the power of music and agreed that the beautiful harmony created by music-loving people indeed enables the creation of a new, peaceful order.

**Ambassador:** Yes, music is often considered a kind of universal language, a language that speaks directly to the heart. In the world of music, there are no language barriers, no borders and no differences between people, races, religions and nationalities. Music brings people together and creates beautiful and peaceful harmony. I agree that it touches all the emotions and can help develop greater mutual understanding, respect and trust among different people.

I will tell you a personal story about my grandfather-in-law. He was born in Vienna, Austria and was a violinist in one of the leading orchestras there. But when the Nazis arrived in



The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Leonard Bernstein in 1985

Austria, the Jewish people were forced to flee. At the time, the doors to many countries were closed to Jews, yet he managed to survive by playing his violin—which he had taken with him when he left the country—in different orchestras around the world. He played in a small orchestra in Tunisia, then he found a job in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) playing in a small orchestra at the famous Galle Face Hotel. After that, he went all the way to Shanghai because he had nowhere else to go. And even in wartime Shanghai, he played in a small Jewish orchestra. Music and the violin were fundamental to his life during that period.

The embassy of Israel plans to organize several cultural events in 2014. One event that is sure to be interesting is a performance by a

piano duo of internationally renowned concert pianists. One of them is Jewish and the other is Arab, and they will perform together at several venues in Japan. It will be a very special event and a good opportunity to communicate the importance of working together and creating together in harmony. Indeed, this harmony is expressed more and more in collaborations between Jews and Arabs. For example, in Tel Aviv we have an Arab-Jewish Choir and all kinds of ensembles that combine both Arab and Jewish elements. The fact that these two concert pianists will perform together is very encouraging and sends an important message of coexistence and harmony. We look forward to collaborating with Min-On to organize such events in the future.

## From the Editor

- » On the Friday evening of January 24, Melodia Permanete (Melody in Eternity), an original composition dedicated to the Min-On Founder by upcoming tango master Emilliano Greco, premiered at a Tokyo performance of the 45th instalment of the Min-On Tango Series before an audience of some 2,000 people. Twenty-five years ago in 1989, the legendary tango maestro Osvaldo Pugliese, who was over 80 years old at the time, delivered the final performance of his career in Japan at a concert organized by Min-On. Two years later in 1991, he dedicated the song Tokyo Luminoso to the Founder as a token of lasting friendship. He said that he wanted to strive toward peace in concert with the Founder, and that he would fight so that tragedy would never be repeated. We heard the same conviction from the young maestros Emilliano and Lautaro Greco at the ceremony in which they dedicated the piece.
- » When we visited Ambassador Kahanoff at her office in the Israeli Embassy, we brought with us an old program from 1995 produced for a tour of the Israeli Efroni Choir. We shared with her our experience of being both impressed and inspired by the choir 19 years ago. Before the choir embarked on that first Japan tour, the Founder met with the conductor Maya Shavit and members of the Efroni Choir and expressed his sincere respect for the Jewish people, a people who maintained their dignity and humanity even during the Holocaust. Stating his belief that singing was one way in which the Jewish people held on to their dignity, he noted that Jewish history was marked by many notable and courageous songs, which were delivered by the choir to people all over the world. Ms. Shavit expressed her agreement when the Founder shared his conviction that these cultural exchanges acted as a road toward peace.



### From the Min-On Music Museum Collection



#### “Dominion” Organ 1905, Canada

*The Dominion Organ and Piano Company is thought to have been founded around 1870, and was renamed the Dominion Organ Co. in 1875. It specialized in cabinet reed organs, distinctive for the reed-qualifying tubes which replaced tuning slides to give even-register voicing. Dominion organs won various international medals and prizes in the United States and Europe. Although they had produced a large number of superb quality organs, the company closed in 1936, a victim of the Great Depression of the mid-1930s.*

*The Dominion Organ in the Min-On collection was manufactured in 1905 and presented from Maestro Siegfried Andraschek of the Vienna Operetta Orchestra. It is easy to appreciate the distinctive quality of the workmanship from this internationally acclaimed organ manufacturer.*

### 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 77,000 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!

**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

