

# harmony

Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association



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## “Crested Ibises” — Interview with Zhu Jiejing and Wang Jiajun

Since a special preview performance was held in Tokyo in October last year (reported in the 2014 autumn issue of *Harmony*), a wide audience of the Min-On Concert Association has eagerly anticipated the Japanese premiere of the dance drama “Crested Ibises.” In commemoration of the Sino-Japanese friendship nurtured through Min-On’s 40-year cultural exchange with China, a total of 59 selected members of the Shanghai Dance Theater launched a two-month tour on June 2 in the city of Sendai, Miyagi prefecture. They successfully staged 57 performances of their graceful and picturesque production for more than 100,000 enthusiastic dance fans in 28 cities across Japan. After their last performance held in Hachioji, Tokyo, on July 31, we interviewed the leading dancers of the Shanghai Dance Theater, Ms. Zhu Jiejing and Mr. Wang Jiajun.

**Min-On:** Your nationwide 28-city tour of the dance drama performance “Crested Ibises” has been received very well at every venue across Japan. The majority of those audiences may have experienced the beautiful and touching performance of dance drama for the first time. First, please briefly tell us

about the new genre of performing arts called “Chinese Dance Drama.”

**Wang Jiajun:** “Dance Drama” developed rapidly after the founding of New China in the 1940s. It integrates elements of traditional Chinese opera, classical Western ballet, contemporary dance as well as modern performing arts. A major characteristic of Chinese dance drama is enacting a storyline without speaking or singing onstage through dancing, music and stage design.

**Zhu Jiejing:** It is not spoken drama. Because there are no words, performers must depict sensitive emotions and an image of each character through physical motion and the expression of dance. From our head to our toes, we try to utilize every part of our body to express depth of character—from utter grief to immense joy. Furthermore, musical expression, costumes and stage design are important factors in creating the storyline onstage, allowing the audience to enjoy dance drama from many different angles.



Wang Jianjun (left) and Zhu Jiejing (right) share their experience

**Min-On:** Based on the true story of the internationally endangered bird species, the crested ibis, this dance drama is produced with a thematic focus on the symbiotic relationships between nature, human beings and other living creatures. Performing with such a significant theme, what have you tried to accomplish onstage?

**Zhu:** I always tried to keep feelings of affection for the crested ibis and veneration for nature in the back of my mind—as well as advocating environmental protection. Not just simply mimicking the physical motions of the bird, I’ve visualized the elegance and

attractiveness of the crested ibis and tried to recreate their beloved features in my dancing.

**Wang:** I am playing the role of a young man named “Jun,” a character symbolic of the human race, standing in contrast to all other species in the realm of nature represented by the crested ibis. Throughout the rehearsal process, I constantly considered the emotions people might have when face-to-face with the reality of the extinction of a species like the crested ibis. That’s why I couldn’t simply act the role of Jun in the play, but also expressed my true emotions as I portrayed the young man.

**Min-On:** In October of last year, for the special preview performance in Japan, you visited Sado Island, where crested ibises have been reintroduced into their natural habitat.



environmental pollution, the crested ibis was threatened with extinction. Yet now, because of people’s concern about the environment, crested ibises have flourished and again fly high in the sky over Japan. The actual history and the story of this stage production “Crested Ibises” overlap each other, and we have been imbued with something like a karmic bond in the truest sense.

**Min-On:** There was a huge audience response to your performance at every venue. How does that make you feel?

**Wang:** Honestly speaking, before I actually experienced this tour in Japan, I always imagined that a Japanese audience would never express an emotional response during our performance—even during an exciting scene. Rather, I thought they would be well

**Wang:** Touring for two months abroad was a first-time experience for me. Before arriving in Japan, I was seriously concerned about maintaining good health with enough sleep and regular meals traveling across Japan, and how to accomplish this significant and unprecedented performance without any serious physical problems. But, since our arrival in Japan, the Min-On staff have given thoughtful attention to minute details. They have allowed us to complete our performances throughout Japan without incident.

**Zhu:** The great success of this two-month long tour gave us tremendous confidence, and now we are looking forward to extending the tour to other countries in the near future. Because of the warmest hospitality and around-the-clock care provided by the Japanese staff, we



“Chinese Dance Drama” utilizes musical accompaniment, costumes, stage design and dance to express emotion

**Wang:** Yes, it was the first time we saw a wild crested ibis. Because of our emotional attachment to the bird for this performance, the experience of seeing live ibises on Sado Island made a strong impression on us. Also, we saw the stuffed specimen of a crested ibis named Kin, which was the last member of the species on the verge of extinction on Sado Island. During our performance in Japan, I held in my mind the moment I stood in front of the showcase displaying Kin.

**Zhu:** Right before the last bird Kin passed away, China presented a pair of crested ibises to Japan, and they successfully bred on Sado Island. When I visited the island last year, I was surprised to learn that painstaking efforts have been made to gradually reintroduce the species into the wild, with each bird being carefully taken care of. Because of

mannered, sit politely in the theater and modestly enjoy our performance without cheering loudly or clapping. At the beginning of our performance, as I imagined, the audience was very quiet, and even though I was expecting such a quiet response from them, I started wondering whether our performance would please them. But when the grand finale came, every last member gave us a standing ovation. We were greatly surprised and deeply touched by their enthusiastic response.

**Zhu:** Every time I saw the audience members in the front row, their eyes were filled with tears. We have been deeply moved by our Japanese audiences at every venue we performed in.

**Min-On:** What was the strongest impression you brought back from this Japan tour?

felt at home in the friendly atmosphere created everywhere, even backstage. We are very happy about the mutual understanding we developed through this precious collaborative art production with the Japanese people. I will never forget the debt of gratitude I owe them.

**Wang:** We also learned about people who have long devoted themselves to friendly relations between our two nations. I think that the younger generation of our nations must follow those pioneers’ wishes to further strengthen the bond of friendship that will bind us together forever.

**Zhu:** We reaffirmed the significance of international cultural exchange in cultivating friendships with people of different countries, and felt a strong sense of responsibility as artists to contribute to the cause of world peace.

## Singing to Expand Heart-to-Heart Connections for a Peaceful World

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II as well as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Various memorial events have been held all over the world under the common theme of “No More War.” As a part of its long-standing cultural lecture series, the Min-On Music Museum sponsored a special cultural lecture and symposium entitled “The Power of Music for Connecting Hearts of All Mankind” on the solemn occasion of the 70th anniversary in Nagasaki on July 20. Dr. Agnes Chan, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador for Japan, and Dr. Olivier Urbain, senior research fellow of the Min-On Music Research Institute and director of the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, delivered keynote speeches to a house full of participants at the Nagasaki Brick Hall.

Dr. Chan, originally from Hong Kong, is a renowned Asian pop singer and popular Japanese television personality, who also holds a doctorate of education from Stanford University. She started doing volunteer work on children’s rights issues when she was in junior high school in Hong Kong. Since she began working with the Japan Committee for UNICEF in 1998, she has made a number of trips to African, Asian and Middle Eastern countries to advocate UNICEF-sponsored programs for children and women.

During her lecture in Nagasaki, Dr. Chan shared the experience of visiting her mother’s hometown in Guizhou province of China, where she met with local children. She talked about her memories of the children cheerfully welcoming her by singing one of her songs, and how this moving experience in China elevated her confidence in the power of music to connect the hearts of people. Dr. Chan remarked that this experience with children became a focal point

of her conviction to continue singing songs to expand heart-to-heart connections for a peaceful world. She expressed her wishes for the people of Nagasaki to communicate their experiences of war, the bombings and their fervent desire for future generations to take the lead in working for world peace. Her lecture was followed by Dr. Urbain’s keynote lecture, and then the local women’s choir Hahazakura (mother cherry trees in Japanese) Chorus sang a song written by the Min-On Founder entitled “Peaceful World,” together with pop singer Agnes Chan. The cultural lecture successfully concluded with a question-and-answer session and an enthusiastic discussion on the subject of peace building.



## Min-On Museum Chronicles a 70-Year Musical Journey



Commemorating the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II this year, the Min-On Music Museum opened a special exhibition entitled “Music Journey—the 70-Year Musical History of Post-World War II Era Japan” on September 8. Under the supervision of longstanding distinguished producer and music critic Naoki Tachikawa, who delivered a series of Min-On Cultural Lectures on the same theme, the exhibition showcases the history of the familiar standards of Japanese music developing under the influences of Western music, numerous technological innovations in sound sources and music-reproducing media, as well as musical instruments over the last 70 years. Visitors can enjoy a number of panels describing the dynamics of musical history in the post-war era and displays of memorabilia from epoch-making artists, concerts and albums. The exhibition in the special exhibit room of the Min-On Culture Center continues through December 20.

## “Anata Bolivia” Shares the Nostalgic Sounds of Andean *Folclore* in Japan



La Paz, the administrative capital of Bolivia, is one of the highest capital cities in the world at 3,650 meters above sea level. Beautiful snow-capped mountains form the background for modern skyscrapers and ancient historic structures in La Paz, the political and commercial hub of Bolivia, and the home of indigenous Andean culture. Especially after the Bolivian national revolution of the 20th century, the new government promoted indigenous folklore by establishing

a department for it in the Bolivian Ministry of Education. Awareness of indigenous music has risen since then, and a traditional genre of folk music called *Folclore* in Spanish has gained popularity not just in Bolivia, but also worldwide.

Hiroyuki Akimoto, leader and singer of the popular Bolivian *Folclore* band “Anata Bolivia,” was born in Japan but discovered the nostalgic sounds of *Folclore* when he joined a folk music club as a student. After graduating from

university in Japan, he moved to the home of *Folclore*—La Paz, Bolivia. As a musician in Bolivia he gradually gained recognition for his guitar and vocal skills as well as songwriting and composing talent. Anata Bolivia, since its formation with local Bolivian musicians in 2005, has been well received by Bolivian audiences and nominated for the Bolivian version of the Grammy Awards, the Cicombol, on a number of occasions.

## Ecuadorian Pianist Boris Cepeda Delivers Cultural Lecture & Concert



One of the fundamental aims of the Min-On Concert Association is to contribute to the flourishing of music and art by promoting musical outreach programs open to the general public. As a part of these public service projects, the Min-On Music Museum occasionally hosts a series of music-related cultural lectures in conjunction with admission-free mini concerts held at the Min-On Culture Center in Shinanomachi, Tokyo. A variety of cultural commentators, artists and music critics are invited to speak on themes pertaining to the special events and exhibitions held at the Min-On Music Museum.

This summer, in cooperation with the embassy of the Republic of Ecuador in Tokyo, Min-On sponsored a cultural lecture and piano recital by the internationally acclaimed Ecuadorian pianist Boris Cepeda on July 3 at

the Museum Hall, with a capacity audience who were chosen through lottery from the RSVP postcards received.

Boris Cepeda took his first piano lessons at age four and appeared on Ecuadorian television at age five. In addition to his worldwide concert activities, Boris Cepeda has been working as a piano pedagogue since 1991 and has given master classes and concert lectures at schools, music academies and conservatories in Europe, Southeast Asia and South America. His lecture and concert at the Min-On Museum Hall began with several famous piano pieces of Franz Schubert and Frederic Chopin, followed by brief explanations on the history of musical development in Ecuador. His performance of various pieces by Ecuadorian composers gave the audience both intellectual satisfaction and artistic pleasure.

# Diversity Itself Is the Music of Ecuador

Interview with H.E. Leonardo Carrion Eguiguren, Ambassador of the Republic of Ecuador to Japan



It is our greatest pleasure that the Japanese people have learned about Ecuador through the performance of musicians and artists invited by the Min-On Concert Association.

**Min-On:** This summer, in cooperation with the Embassy of Ecuador, we had the opportunity to invite Mr. Boris Cepeda to our Min-On Culture Center, and he gave a piano recital in the Museum Hall. Thank you so much for your courteous support for that event.

**Ambassador Eguiguren:** Boris Cepeda is one of the foremost virtuoso pianists of our country. Based in Germany, he has been wonderfully energetic in his international concert activities. He worked as a cultural attaché to the Embassy of the Republic of Ecuador in Berlin for five years from 2002 to 2007, during which time he enriched his experience with classical music as well as his legacy of introducing Ecuadorian music to a wider audience in Germany. He has delivered his masterful performances not only in Europe but also at distinguished concert halls around the world. And of course, he is a renowned and respected musician in his home country of Ecuador, with a great reputation as the initiator and artistic director of the Ecuadorian International Music Festival “Mendelssohnfest.”

**Min-On:** Mr. Cepeda played various kinds of Ecuadorian music at the concert, and listening to the rhythms and melodies, we felt they have something in common with Japanese music. Please share your thoughts on the music of Ecuador in general.

**Ambassador:** Ecuador is a country of diversity and it has an abundance of many different cultures. There are a wide variety of cultural influences in Ecuador, from the indigenous people of course, but also from European and African peoples. The country is divided into three geographical zones, including mountainous areas, coastal areas and forested areas. These ethnic and geographical factors have caused different types of cultural development and distinctive styles of musical expression

to form in each area. For example, music in the mountainous areas typically has an air of pathos, and in the coastal areas, because of a large population of African descent, you will mainly find cheerful and vibrant music and dance. Generally speaking, styles of music in the forested areas have been developed under Spanish influences. This is why we cannot bundle all of our musical culture together and discuss it as Ecuadorian music—rather, we should say that diversity itself is the music of Ecuador.

**Min-On:** One of the aims of the Min-On Concert Association is to introduce musical culture and performing arts from different countries to a wider audience, developing mutual understanding and respect among people of different races and nationalities through our cultural exchange activities. If you have any impressions of Min-On’s activities, please share them with us.



Duo Paganini’s mini-concert at the Min-On Music Museum in 2010

**Ambassador:** I have attended Min-On’s events a number of times, and I deeply appreciated and enjoyed the performances. I pay great tribute to the dedicated efforts of the Min-On Concert Association for continuing to host artists and musicians from all over the world. Japan has a long history as an independent country, but as an island country, it is relatively isolated from the rest of the world. Perhaps it has not been easy to keep up with trends from and information about other countries. Therefore, I think it is both valuable and wonderful that Min-On has introduced

musical culture and performing arts from many different countries to Japanese audiences and has worked continuously to build cultural bridges worldwide.

For example, many Japanese people may know about the World Heritage Site in Ecuador, the famous Galapagos Islands, and may know about a well-known brand of Ecuadorian bananas, but a

chance to access and enjoy the music and arts of Ecuador in Japan is rare. It is our greatest pleasure that the Japanese people have learned about Ecuador through the performance of musicians and artists invited by the Min-On Concert Association, and I sincerely appreciate such wonderful endeavors.

**Min-On:** Since its launch last year, the Min-On Music Research Institute has conducted academic research on the power of music from many different angles. We would like to hear your thoughts or comments on the subject.

**Ambassador:** I think music is a kind of

language. Language is a means to smoothly communicate among people and deepen mutual understanding. However, there are many different languages in the world, and it is very difficult and complicated to master them. But music is different: it's simply rhythm and melody and its understanding is universal. When I have attended Min-On concerts, I have been inspired to see Japanese audiences joyfully dancing to the music played by the band onstage, and I have felt the power of music.

I believe that through music people can understand more about each other. I am convinced that developing mutual

understanding among different people is the most direct path to world peace.

We are looking forward to the centennial celebration of diplomatic relations between Ecuador and Japan scheduled for 2018. Many musicians and artists from Ecuador will visit Japan and hold a variety of cultural events, including academic exchanges and inter-country sports events. Our embassy will make every effort to prepare for the centennial celebration—to successfully bring further exchanges between the two countries to fruition and strengthen the bonds of friendship through the next 100 years.



A popular Ecuadorian group Koral y Esmeraldo concert in 1994

## From the Editor

- » During our interview with the dancers of “Crested Ibises,” Zhu Jiejing and Wang Jiajun both told us how much effort they had put into expressing their emotions through just their physical movements. Indeed, many audience members left comments after the performance in response to a questionnaire saying they were greatly inspired by the artistic expression of the performance and deeply touched by the emotions conveyed in the drama. Those comments reminded us of the words of the Min-On Founder, who wrote: “Art is the cry of the soul from the core of one’s being. Creating and appreciating art sets free the soul trapped deep within us. That is why art causes such joy. Art, quite aside from any questions of skill or its lack, is the emotion, the pleasure of expressing one’s life exactly as it is. Those who see such art are moved by its passion, its strength, its intensity and its beauty. That is why it is impossible to separate fully human life from art.”
- » Exactly 40 years ago in early September 1975, the Beijing Art Troup arrived in Tokyo for their first Japan tour at the invitation

of the Min-On Concert Association. The event marked the beginning of Min-On’s cultural exchange program with the People’s Republic of China, which was realized at the initiative of Dr. Daisaku Ikeda after he met the late Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in 1974. Based on his conviction that friendly relations between the two nations should be deepened and the belief that a genuine bridge of culture cannot be broken, Min-On has to date welcomed an impressive 45 cultural and artistic groups from China as a means of promoting bilateral goodwill and presented a total of more than 1,900 performances to a combined audience of several million people throughout Japan. Even in the recent difficult political climate between the two countries, over 100 thousand people came to enjoy this tour of the extraordinary Chinese dance drama “Crested Ibises” by the Shanghai Dance Theatre. Thanks to the success of this summer’s tour, we renewed our confidence in Min-On’s continued mission to nurture grassroots friendship and mutual understanding.

### From the Min-On Music Museum Collection



**“Marshal” Player Piano  
1915, London, England**

The player piano enjoyed its peak of popularity between 1900 and 1930, becoming a main source of home entertainment. For those

who are not familiar with this instrument, it is best described simply as a self-playing piano. Just insert a music roll, take a deep breath and pedal. The notes to be played are represented by tiny perforations on interchangeable rolls of paper, while the player mechanism is powered entirely by suction, generated normally by the operation of two foot pedals.

This beautiful Marshal Player Piano in the Min-On Music Museum collection was manufactured in 1915 in London. It features a traditional foot-pump mechanism; however, it was later modified with an electric-powered pump to assist the player’s pedaling action. Player pianos can also be played by hand normally, as the piano action and keys are entirely conventional. In fact, it is usually possible to play the keys while the roll mechanism is in operation, should any additional notes or harmonies be desired.

### 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.

### 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.

### 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

