Cultural Exchange and Performing Arts

harmony
Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association

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contents

The Main Event
2 Shaanxi Song and Dance Troupe Celebrates Sino-Japanese Friendship
3 Shaanxi Song and Dance Troupe Presents Honorary Title to Min-On Founder

Feature
2 Interview with the Troupe’s Deputy Director Wang Hong

News Update
4 Min-On Initiates a Series of School Concerts in the Tohoku Region
4 The Ventures Celebrate 50th Anniversary of First Japan Tour
5 Island Youth Delivers the Beauty and Joy of Okinawan Dance
5 The Little Singers Present the Rich Culture of Armenia Across Japan

Interview
6 Friendship Year for Japan-China Exchanges: Interview with H.E. Cheng Yonghua, Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China to Japan

From the Editor
7 Reflections on Sino-Japanese friendship

Min-On Information
8 Western Japan Branch of Min-On Music Museum Opens in Kobe
On the evening of 10 July, the Shaanxi Song and Dance Troupe’s *Moon over the Capital—Music and Dance of the Tang Dynasty* premiered in Tokyo before a capacity audience at Nakano Sun Plaza Hall. In attendance were ambassadors and diplomats from 19 countries. The performance was followed by a commemorative reception in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China.

The Shaanxi Song and Dance Troupe is the largest and most prestigious theatrical company in Western China. The troupe’s formidable reputation has been built up over its long history. It was formed in 1940 and is based in the city of Xi’an, a city once known as the ancient Chinese capital of Chang’an. For this first-time tour of Japan, the troupe co-produced this performance of *Moon over the Capital* with the Min-On Concert Association. The original production was written and choreographed by the troupe’s deputy director, Wang Hong, and is based on the story—woven from historical fact—of a Japanese official envoy to China in the 8th century. The performance began with a prologue, in which a ship carrying the Japanese mission is making its way through heavy seas on a stormy night. A 19-year-old Japanese envoy, Abe-no-Nakamaro, is standing on the bow of the ship, looking into the far distance, eagerly anticipating his studies in China.

Spectacular performances of music and dance handed down from ancient China followed over a total of two acts of fourteen scenes, depicting the artistic grace and magnificence of the imperial court in the capital of Chang’an during the prosperous Tang Dynasty more than 1,300 years ago. In a dramatic final scene, the Emperor Xuang of Tang presents a silk robe to the 70-year-old Nakamaro in honor of his lifelong dedication to the glory and prosperity of the Tang Dynasty. This moved the audience to tears and drew a storm of applause.

The Shaanxi Song and Dance Troupe successfully concluded their two-month-long nationwide tour of 47 cities in Japan—a tour that included 96 engagements—and left Tokyo to return home to Xi’an on July 15. They carried with them a sense of fulfillment at having celebrated Sino-Japanese friendship.

### Interview with the Troupe’s Deputy Director Wang Hong

**Min-On**: The Shaanxi Song and Dance Troupe has performed in over 40 countries on the five major continents, and has won a renowned reputation over the course of its 70-year history.

**Wang Hong**: The Shaanxi Song and Dance Troupe grew out of the Northwest Art Troupe in 1968, which itself had originally been established in 1940. More recently, several performing arts groups from the Shaanxi region, including the Song and Dance Troupe, the Opera and Dance Drama Theater, the Orchestra, the Acrobatic Troupe and the Folk Art Theater, have come together under the umbrella of the Shaanxi Performing Arts Group. More than 700 performing artists and staff currently belong to the Group, and throughout its long history, it has cultivated a total of more than 3,000 artists.

**Min-On**: Your institution is based in the city of Xi’an, formerly the ancient Tang Dynasty capital of Chang’an. The Troupe has created a number of original productions that introduce the gracious culture and music of ancient imperial China, including *Moon Over the Capital* for this Japan tour.

**Wang Hong**: Actually, Chang’an served as the capital for 13 different dynasties in Chinese history. During the Tang Dynasty, it was one of the largest cities in the world with a population...
On July 2, 2012, the Institute of the Shaanxi Provincial Song and Dance Theater from Xi’an, China, bestowed the title of Honorary President on Min-On founder Dr. Daisaku Ikeda. Dr. Ikeda was recognized for his longstanding efforts to promote Sino-Japanese friendship through cultural and educational exchanges, and for his many and various contributions to global peace.

The presentation ceremony, which was attended by the entire cast of the Shaanxi Provincial Song and Dance Troupe during their Japan tour and by Min-On staff, took place at the Min-On Culture Center in Tokyo. There, the President of the Institute, Liu Qing, presented a certificate of citation to Soka Gakkai Vice General Director Hiromasa Ikeda, a director of the Min-On Concert Association. Mr. Ikeda participated in the ceremony on his father’s behalf.

In the citation, President Liu commended Min-On founder Dr. Ikeda for his promotion of cultural exchanges through the Min-On Concert Association. He praised Dr. Ikeda’s conviction that Min-On could develop friendship and mutual understanding between the two countries, and described him as a potent force in peace-building through his humanistic philosophy.

In an acceptance message read out by Mr. Hiromasa Ikeda, Min-On founder Dr. Ikeda conveyed his appreciation and pride at the privilege of receiving the honorary title. He reminisced on his visit to Xi’an in 1974, and was reminded of his determination, made during his stay in Xi’an, to dedicate his efforts toward building a “Bridge of Hearts” that would connect the people of Japan and China, and toward developing a close alliance between the two countries. All the participants in the ceremony shared this determination to further promote Sino-Japanese friendship.
News Update

Min-On Initiates Series of School Concerts in the Tohoku Region

More than a year has passed since the great earthquake and subsequent tsunami hit the northeastern coastal areas of the Tohoku region in Japan. Since then, hundreds of thousands of people in the affected areas have supported and encouraged each other, and have continued to work together toward Tohoku’s early and safe recovery. In the spirit of providing spiritual support through the power of music and taking into account the needs of future generations, the Min-On Concert Association, based on its longstanding experience of organizing admission-free concerts at more than 3,900 schools across Japan, has initiated a series of Min-On School Concerts entitled The Tohoku Hope Concert—Musical Bonds of the Heart with the aim of putting on concerts at primary and secondary schools in 39 towns and cities in the three most affected prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima from now until August 2015.

The first “Hope Concert”, cosponsored by TBS Radio & Communications, Inc., IBC Iwate Broadcasting Company, Ltd., The Tohoku Broadcasting Company, and Radio Fukushima Co., Ltd., was held on May 14 at Kesenuma Junior High School in the city of Rikuzen-Takata in Iwate prefecture. After the original school building was completely submerged and devastated by the tsunami, the students moved to the buildings of a previously closed school in the same city and have continued with their classes despite great inconvenience. The Japanese popular vocal group INSPI—a leading a cappella group of six male singers—appeared onstage in the school building and performed a number of popular songs with a rich and powerful delivery. Although the students were bashful and quiet at the beginning of the concert, eventually they were all inspired and excited by the beautiful harmony of INSPI’s dynamic singing. In response to the wonderful concert, the young audience were all standing at the end and singing their school song together, expressing their gratitude and determination to continue meeting the challenges they face.

Kicking off the three-year-long series, The Tohoku Hope Concert was held for three consecutive days—on May 15 at Tokura and Shizugawa Joint Elementary School in the city of Minami-Sanriku-cho in Miyagi prefecture, and on May 16 at Kashima Junior High School in the city of Minami-Soma in Fukushima prefecture—offering younger generations in the Tohoku region the opportunity to experience the power of music and regain hope and the courage to build a bright future.

The Ventures Celebrate 50th Anniversary of First Japan Tour

One of the most influential of rock and roll pioneers, the Ventures—the quintessential American guitar combo formed in the pre-Beatles era of 1958—served as a prototype for guitar-based instrumental rock groups around the world and helped define the genre of “surf music” in the early 60s. At the time, nobody knew how the band and their brand of surf music would go down in Japan. Thus, on their first Japan tour, only two of the members came—cofounders Don Wilson and the late Bob Bogle—because the promoter did not have the budget to bring the entire band. In the half-century since, although the band members have changed a number of times, the Ventures have remained active, recording and touring to the delight of fans around the world. To date, the band has played more than 2,500 performances in Japan.

On July 24, as the climax of their sixty-third Japan tour, the Ventures—with a line-up that included original member Don Wilson—played a commemorative concert celebrating the 50th anniversary of their first trip to Japan in 1962. The cool and breezy sounds of classic surf music—including favorites such as Diamond Head, Pipeline and Walk Don’t Run—echoed around the Nakano Sun Plaza Hall on a hot summer evening in Tokyo.
Island Youth Delivers the Beauty and Joy of Okinawan Dance

The islands of Okinawa are surrounded by beautiful ocean and blessed with a superb natural environment. The islands were once a small independent nation called the Ryukyu Kingdom, where since ancient times a unique culture had developed with distinctive performing arts.

The Dance Troupe Hanayakara (which means “the superb beauty of blossoms” in the Okinawan dialect) is made up of a group of energetic young female dancers from the islands aged between 5 and 21. Another performing group from Okinawa named Urakaji (meaning “a fresh ocean breeze”) is composed entirely of college students, and specializes in dynamic dance routines accompanied by rhythmical performances on traditional Ryukyu drums and folk instruments. Both groups have created original repertoires based on the traditional music and culture of Okinawa, refining their energetic performances through daily practice slotted in around schoolwork.

Churabu Kikou—A Wonderful Journey to the Beauty and Joy of Okinawan Dance is a Min-On-sponsored collaboration between the two groups. The production embarked on a 12-city tour in the Kanto and Tokai areas during the school summer break. On the evening of August 6, they concluded their memorable summer holidays’ tour at the Nakano Sun Plaza Hall in Tokyo, their youthful and cheerful performances drawing smiles and happy applause from the audience.

The Little Singers Present the Rich Culture of Armenia Across Japan

On the Friday evening of August 10, The Little Singers of Armenia choir, directed by its founder Tigran Hekekyan, successfully concluded their first Japan tour in front of a capacity audience at the magnificent Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall. The extended tour, which was held to celebrate the 20th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Armenia, stopped off at a total of 16 cities across Japan over the course of a month. As applause filled the venue following the encore, tears were in the eyes of many of the 39 teenagers—the joy of having successfully accomplished an important tour presenting the rich choral culture of Armenia to Japanese people and establishing long-lasting ties of friendship between the two nations was clear.

This long-awaited Japan tour began in Yamagata prefecture in northeastern Japan, an area that was relatively lightly affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Since Armenia experienced a similar massive earthquake in 1988, they expressed through song their condolences to the people of Japan and their wishes for the speedy revival of the Tohoku region. From the northern island of Hokkaido to the southern island of Kyushu, and throughout the main island of Honshu, the girls sang a wide variety of choral pieces, from well-known hymns written by famous Armenian composers to popular jazz numbers, and from Japanese folk songs to Latin bossa nova, earning tremendous ovations from packed audiences at each venue.

Toward the end of the tour on August 5, the Little Singers visited the international city of Kobe, which was severely affected by the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake in 1995. There, a friendly exchange gathering was organized with several local youth choirs at the Kansai International Culture Center. Upon their arrival, members of the Hyogo Prefecture Boys and Girls Noble Choir greeted the Little Singers, cheerfully waving small Armenian flags and delivering some words of welcome in the Armenian language. The Kansai Boys and Girls Choir sang a popular Armenian song with beautiful Armenian pronunciation, and The Kansai Soka High School Leonard’s Choir sang several favorite numbers, including Mother, which was dedicated to the parents of the Armenian friends. In return, the Little Singers sang the famous Japanese folk song Aizu Bando-San, and at the end of the exchange, youths of both Japanese and Armenian nations sang shoulder to shoulder a Japanese favorite classic Furusato (homeland). The Little Singers left Tokyo on August 12, returning home to Armenia with precious memories of friendship established during their ground-breaking Japan tour.
Friendship Year for Japan-China Exchanges

Interview with H.E. Cheng Yonghua, Ambassador of the People’s Republic of China to Japan

Ambassador Cheng was among the first students to come to Japan under a Chinese government scholarship in 1975, studying at Soka University in Hachioji, Tokyo. The university was established by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, founder of the Min-On Concert Association. After graduating from Soka University, Cheng entered the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and was posted to Japan from 1977, eventually serving as a counselor and deputy chief of mission at the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo. In 2006, he was appointed ambassador to Malaysia, and in 2008, he became ambassador to the Republic of Korea. Since 2010, he has been the ambassador of the People’s Republic of China to Japan.

Min-On: In 1975, the Min-On Concert Association invited the Beijing Art Troupe to Japan as the first of a series of cultural exchanges with the People’s Republic of China. Since then, we have been very happy to bring various performing artists and groups from China on more than 40 separate Japan tours.

Ambassador Cheng Yonghua: First of all, as the ambassador of China, I would like to express sincerely my deepest appreciation to the Min-On Concert Association for its steadfast promotion of cultural exchange with China over so many years, under the initiative of Min-On Founder, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda. When the Beijing Art Troupe was invited by Min-On for the first Japan tour in 1975, I was a foreign student from China, studying in Japan at the Soka University. Together with my school friends, I had the opportunity of seeing the Troupe’s performance in Tokyo, and I can still vividly recall my wonderful memories of those days. Since then, I have admired the incredible efforts of the Min-On Concert Association at building mutual understanding between the people of our two countries. The Association has developed a bond of friendship through consecutive series of cultural exchanges almost every year since that time.

China and Japan have a relationship stretching back to ancient times, and there are many commonalities in our art and culture. However, it was only through those opportunities for cultural exchange that we could deepen our mutual understanding and strengthen the relationship between our two countries. In that sense, I sincerely wish to reiterate my admiration and gratitude toward the Min-On Concert Association for its untiring efforts and accomplishments over the past 40 or so years.

Min-On: This year marks the 40th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China, and to celebrate this auspicious occasion, Min-On invited the Shaanxi Song and Dance Troupe to tour Japan. Could you briefly tell us your thoughts about art and culture in China?

Ambassador: I heard that this performance by the Shaanxi Song and Dance Troupe is about the old Chinese capital of Chang’an, and that it introduces ancient Chinese music and dance culture based on the historically factual story of a Japanese envoy to China. The envoy was a student named Abe-no-Nakamaro, who studied and lived in the capital city of Chang’an during the Tang Dynasty in 8th century China, and who dedicated his life to the Chinese people. I am really looking forward to seeing the Tokyo premiere of this performance in July. The Tang Dynasty period in China was a time when the empire achieved great richness in its arts and culture, and its capital, Chang’an, became an unprecedentedly cosmopolitan urban center. The imperial government at the time actively promoted cultural exchanges with many different countries, including Japan. I hope that through this Japan tour by the Shaanxi Song and Dance Troupe Japanese audiences will be able to glimpse the international atmosphere of the ancient Chinese capital of Chang’an. I hope they will enjoy the variety of China’s flourishing music and dance culture.

Min-On: This year, as part of the celebration of the 40th anniversary, both governments have organized more than 300 commemorative events in various places under the banner “Friendship Year for Japan-China People-to-People Exchanges”. We look forward to expanding the circle of cultural exchange and further deepening the spirit of friendship among the people of both countries.

Min-On: Your Excellency came to Japan for the first time as an official student from China soon after the normalization of diplomatic relations between both countries. In a sense,
From the Editor:

» In the final scene of *Moon over the Capital* performed by the Shaanxi Song and Dance Troupe, the lead character, Abe-no-Nakamaro, sang his famous poem with a beautiful clear voice, singing “On the horizon—is that not the same moon that rises in spring over the hill of Mikasa?” After his great successes and accomplishments on his mission in China, Nakamaro still dreamed of returning to his home in Japan, yet was foiled by shipwrecks during several attempts. Although he has no regrets about his lifetime of dedication to China, watching the moon over the Chinese capital of Chang’an, he probably recalled the moon over the capital of Nara in Japan, and his heart was filled with nostalgic sentiment and longing for his homeland. Many in the audience were moved to tears by the heartfelt performance about a pioneering hero of Sino-Japanese relations.

» On September 8, 1968, at a meeting attended by 20,000 university students in Japan, Min-On founder Daisaku Ikeda, then president of the Soka Gakkai, issued a bold proposal for the normalization of Japan-China relations. This proposal significantly influenced breakthroughs in Sino-Japanese friendship and helped establish the groundwork for a series of political-level exchanges with China, culminating in the restoration of diplomatic relations in 1972. Since then, Min-On has brought to fruition more than 40 separate Japan tours of various performing artists and groups from the People’s Republic of China, and organized more than 1,500 public performances with a total attendance of more than two-million people to date.

» Min-On founder Dr. Ikeda once wrote, “The friendship that exists between the people of China and Japan today is not the work of political leaders. It is the work of an alliance of wise pacifists who ardently hope for the peace of both nations. It is the crystallization of the people’s will, and it was achieved through their combined effort. . . . Art is a powerful ‘weapon’ in the struggle for peace. It is one of the highest expressions of human victory.”
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.

The Kansai International Culture Center, which houses the new Music Museum, is a symbolic monument of hope and peace to aid in overcoming the hardships brought about by the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake, and has been a very active center for promoting international friendship and goodwill. The new museum, located on the third floor of the center, has a collection of 223 items, including rare antique pianos, finely crafted music boxes, fascinating ethnic and folk instruments, as well as panels introducing the history of the Min-On Concert Association and its programs of cultural exchange concerts and events held in partnership with countries around the world. After viewing the exhibits, the attended guests unanimously expressed their appreciation for the opening of the new museum and great expectations for its future activities to further promote musical culture and performing arts in the Kansai area.

The new music museum is open to the public free of charge, and during the first week of its opening attracted more than 4,500 visitors from 14 different prefectures in western Japan.

Aiming to extend and improve its activities, the Min-On Concert Association newly dedicated a western Japan branch of the Min-On Music Museum in the international city of Kobe in Hyogo prefecture. The grand opening ceremony was held on April 28 with a large attendance of distinguished guests from local communities and municipal governments of Kobe city and Hyogo prefecture.

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