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Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association

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min-on

# The Norwegian Girls' Choir Premiere in Sendai for Japan Tour



**T**he Kingdom of Norway is known for its magnificent natural scenery, from majestic fjords to spectacular auroras. Norway has also given the world a number of influential musical artists. One such artist is internationally acclaimed composer Edvard Grieg, who contributed to the creation of a musical culture unique to Norway. Grieg left many beautiful Norwegian folk songs and choral pieces as part of his legacy.

The Norwegian Girls' Choir is one of the most prominent modern choirs from the country. Since its establishment in 1947, the Choir has maintained a longstanding tradition of sharing the joy of choral music at the highest artistic level. It has participated in many overseas music festivals and won several prizes and awards domestically and internationally.

Min-On was proud to welcome to Japan these young cultural emissaries of Norway, with the cordial support of the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Tokyo. Their eleven-city nationwide tour premiered in the city of Sendai in the Tohoku region on July 14. The tour successfully concluded in the historical city of Kamakura on August 7, having won the highest praise from enthusiastic audiences at every venue.

Min-On asked Ms. Anne Karin Sundal-Ask, artistic director of the Choir, to share her thoughts and impressions on its unprecedented concert tour in Japan.

**About This Concert Tour:** This is really a big concert tour for us. There aren't many choirs in our country that have done a tour like this. We were under a certain degree of pressure singing in such large venues throughout

Japan, and I'm overjoyed that all of the concerts were a great success. I'm very glad that all of the girls could come on this tour, despite various difficulties. Everyone had a valuable experience and learned so much during our very meaningful and fantastic month. We deeply appreciate the exhaustive care and support provided by Min-On throughout this tour.

**About the Japanese Audience:** There's a big difference between a concert in Norway and a concert in Japan. So many audiences here listened to our songs with tears in their eyes and offered tremendous cheers and applause. They even wrote us cards and shared with us their heartfelt comments, such as how they felt about our performance. In Norway, it isn't often that you see the audience crying during a concert, but here, it's happened at every concert we have given. In Norway, people don't say much and keep their emotions inside, even though they do have deep feelings. But I'd like to thank every audience here in Japan for showing all their emotions, because that means so much to us.

**About the First Concert in Sendai:** It was an important start for us, because we heard about what happened and how people have struggled in the region since the 2011 earthquake. A song that really touched our hearts and those of the audience was "Hana wa Saku" ("Flowers Will Bloom"), which, we heard, was written in support of disaster recovery efforts. We also had,

in Norway, a very sad incident some years ago, in which many youths died. Of course, many more people died in the earthquake in Japan, but sorrow in all nations is the same. The girls and I understand that the process of healing takes a long time. All our singers really understand the meaning of the lyrics to "Hana wa Saku" and have very strong feelings when they perform that song.

**About Norwegian Folk Songs:** In our folk music in Norway, songs are written for different occasions with different feelings. For example, wedding marches are uplifting, and then we have lullabies, which are very soft and sweet. We also have some very cheerful dance music, but all in all, Norwegian folk music has a kind of down-to-earth quality. In Norway, people feel deeply, but they don't say too much, so some songs don't even have lyrics—just lots of feeling behind the melody. We sing those songs without words and convey the emotions with our voice.

**About Cultural Exchange and Power of Music:** At all the exchange concerts we had here, we sang with each other and got to know each other quite a bit. And we came to have a sense of respect for each other. And that's good for peace, I believe. Even though there are language barriers, if you do something together, that's just as meaningful. Especially to sing together, without lyrics—that's really a nice way to feel close to each other, and that's the power of music, I feel. Thank you to all audiences in Japan who shared the experience with us.

# China National Peking Opera Company Tours 30 Cities Across Japan

*The Peking Opera, a celebrated art form from China, is performed on a simple stage, which stands in contrast to the elaborate makeup and costumes of the actors. But this modest stage is instantly transformed when the actors start to sing. Their voices can evoke the images of flowers blooming, clouds gathering, or even the flowing of torrents. With just the movement of their bodies, the actors can change a bright and dazzling stage into a world of darkness, or a solemn imperial court of 1,000 years ago. The actors of Peking Opera are—in other words—expected to have the artistic power to create a myriad of scenes from nothing. For this reason, it is often said that the actors are the most crucial component of this exquisite art form.*

The China National Peking Opera Company (CNPOC) is one of the performance art ensembles directly under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China. Situated in Beijing, it was founded in January 1955, with Mei Lanfang as its first president. One of the most celebrated Peking opera artists in modern history, Mei was particularly known for his performances as *qingyi*, a female role known as *dan*. He received tremendous acclaim for his roles in many Peking Opera masterpieces.

The Min-On Concert Association introduced the China National Peking Opera Company to Japanese audiences for the first time in 2002 with a performance of *Peking Opera Omnibus*. Since then, Min-On has collaborated with the CNPOC and brought a variety of Beijing opera productions to Japan in 2006 and 2009.

In commemoration of the 120th anniversary of Mei Lanfang's birth in 1894, and the 95th anniversary of his first visit to Japan for the introduction of Peking opera to Japanese audiences in 1919, the China National Peking Opera Company has specially selected two of Mei's masterpieces. For the CNPOC's fourth Japanese tour, *Farewell My Concubine* (excerpt scenes) and *The Return of the Phoenix* were performed on Min-On's stage in 30 cities from May through July and gained great public favor throughout Japan.



## Farewell My Concubine

Xiang Yu was one of the best warrior-commanders in Chinese history. In this story, Xiang Yu is fighting for the unification of China. His adversary is Liu Bang, who later founded the Han Dynasty. In the play, Liu Bang's forces have surrounded Xiang Yu and practically defeated him. Realizing that the struggle is nearly lost, he composes a poem to express his feelings of failure. His favorite concubine, Consort Yu, hides her own sadness and tries to console Xiang Yu with a song and dance. Sadly, in order to set her beloved husband free, she kills herself with his sword.



## The Return of the Phoenix

This is a Beijing opera version of a romantic comedy. Cheng Pu is a senior minister of the Ming Dynasty. He retires from his court position and returns to his home and family. Cheng Pu has two daughters, Xueyan and Xue'er, of whom Xue'er is his favorite. With his first wife, he had Xueyan, who is his ugly, older daughter. He later had another daughter—the beautiful, intelligent Xue'er—with his concubine.

One day, Cheng Pu meets Mu Juyi, who is poor but ambitious. Cheng Pu hopes that Mu Juyi will be the future husband of his beautiful daughter, Xue'er. But Lady Cheng wants Xueyan, her own daughter, to marry Mu instead. At this point, Zhu Huanran, an ugly aristocrat who desires the lovely Xue'er, enters the picture. The story goes into a comical plot of the daughters' weddings and ends with a happy outcome for all.

## Dixieland Jazz Festival Stirs Audiences Across Japan

*"Let's fly down or drive down to New Orleans / That city has pretty historic scenes / And I'll take you, and parade you down Bourbon Street."*

A concert of the Shannon Powell Traditional All-Star Jazz Band began with the cheerful rhythm of an all-time Dixieland favorite, "Bourbon Street Parade." During

June and July, audiences in 12 cities across Japan were taken on a lively audial tour of New Orleans by Shannon Powell and Yoshio Toyama. This Min-On jazz concert series was entitled *Dixieland Jazz Festival in 2014*.

Shannon Powell—a virtuoso drummer who is considered a living legend of Dixieland jazz—was born and raised in New

Orleans, the birthplace of jazz. Surrounded by the rhythms of jazz and many legendary musicians since his birth, Powell began to play the drums in public at the age of six and has developed his eminent professional career since he was 14. Powell shared some good times in New Orleans with his old friend Yoshio Toyama in the late '60s while the latter was developing his international career as a Japanese Dixieland jazz musician. Toyama is a trumpeter and singer known as the "Japanese Satchmo" (a reference to Louis Armstrong).

On stage, the two New Orleans virtuosos, together with other master musicians, took a capacity audience on an exciting journey of jazz history with their lively performance of classic jazz numbers. Many members of the audience were dancing and marching through the concert hall aisles to the accompaniment of the Dixieland masterpiece, "When the Saints Go Marching In," at the finale of the delightful festival.



## Coloratura Soprano of Victoria Loukianetz Resounds in Six Cities



international debut there as Queen of the Night in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. As a permanent member of the State Opera until 2000, she became a favorite of Viennese audiences. While residing in Austria, Loukianetz has been a regular guest at many prestigious opera houses and international festivals.

Born in the Ukrainian city of Kiev, Loukianetz studied vocal performance in the former Soviet Union from the age of 14. A decade later, in 1990, she was for the first time recognized internationally as a world-class soprano when she won the second-place prize at Min-On's Tokyo International Vocalists Competition. She remarked recently, "The Min-On vocalist competition was the real beginning of my international career as a singer. Everything started from there."

This year, Min-On welcomed Loukianetz back to Japan for her soprano recital tour. She was accompanied by Hanako Toyoda, acclaimed pianist and répétiteur at European opera houses, in nine cities around central and eastern Japan this summer. Loukianetz

has been internationally praised as an elite coloratura soprano. A capacity audience at every venue was mesmerized by the performance of her favorite numbers, such as *The Barber of Seville*, *Un ballo in maschera* (A Masked Ball), *La Bohème*, and many others. Between her scheduled recitals, she visited Tsurunodai Elementary School in Kanagawa prefecture for a Min-On school concert. All the schoolchildren, who gathered in the gymnasium for the performance, truly enjoyed her world-class opera vocals.



The Wiener Staatsoper (Vienna State Opera) in Austria is counted as one of the world's most prestigious opera houses. In 1993, Victoria Loukianetz made her



## Quattrocelli Combines Sweet Cello Sounds With Lively Stage Antics

Cello music offers a wide variety of tone color and acoustic expression. The instrument's range can deliver powerful bass, dramatic tenor, and even some lyrical soprano. The cello is often described as the instrument that sounds

closest to the human voice. Its character is compared to the ideal male voice singing a love song. Usually, cellos are associated with classical music, and a number of concertos and sonatas have been written specifically for the

cello by famous composers.

Quattrocelli is a German cello quartet, made up of four classically trained young virtuosos: Lukas Dreyer, Michael Peternek, Matthias Trück, and Hartwig Christ. The group's music is specially arranged for their unique ensemble. With each member's individual techniques, the group can play a variety of genres extending beyond the classical. From country music to jazz, from Latin to rock-and-roll, the unorthodox style of Quattrocelli's cello performance is a treat for both ears and eyes.

This summer, Quattrocelli embarked on a first-time, six-city nationwide tour of Japan at the invitation of Min-On. The concert began with Bach's famous Air on the G String, followed by a series of famous film music. The performance concluded with a piece by George Gershwin and some Middle Eastern music. As part of the show, the members took turns pantomiming scenes or characters based on the musical numbers, adding an element of humor and surprise. At every venue, a full-capacity audience was captivated by Quattrocelli's energy and passion for music and was highly amused by their stage antics.

## Maestro Yanagisawa Delivers Lecture on The Power of Music

The Min-On Music Museum initiated a new series of cultural lectures entitled *The Power of Music*, in commemoration of Min-On's 50th anniversary last year. The fourth installment was held on Saturday, August 23 at the Min-On Culture Center's museum hall in Tokyo. For this installment of the series, Maestro Toshio Yanagisawa, principal conductor for the Kosovo Philharmonic Orchestra, was invited to speak. Yanagisawa delivered his lecture on the theme of "Bridging Over the Battlefield with Music." The maestro shared his challenges as a conductor for an interethnic orchestra: essentially acting as a bridge between split cultures after the conflicts in the Balkans.

Born in 1971, Yanagisawa studied orchestral conducting in Paris, France. Since winning second place in Min-On's Tokyo International Music Competition for Conducting in 2000, he has guest-conducted for many highly acclaimed Japanese and overseas symphony orchestras. He took the baton for the Kosovo Philharmonic Orchestra for the first time in 2007 as a guest conductor. This period was marked by difficult circumstances in the Province of Kosovo, governed by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Later, in 2009, the maestro was appointed principal conductor of the orchestra.

Yanagisawa also contributed to the establishment of the Balkan Chamber Orchestra of Sofia, in hopes of developing interethnic harmony across that region. Indeed, the orchestra held a successful concert with the involvement of Serbian, Albanian, and Macedonian members, together with the cooperation of the United Nations.



Such a joint performance of different ethnicities in the Balkans was a first in 20 years of conflict. The concert became a great testimony of the "power of music" to facilitate the development of mutual understanding and respect among people of different ethnicities and cultures.

Yanagisawa's stories about his experiences inspired all participants and received loud applause in appreciation of the maestro and music in general.

# Uniqueness of Norwegian Culture is Its Closeness to Nature

Interview with Minister-Counselor Bjørn Midthun, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Royal Norwegian Embassy



“Norwegians live in close proximity to nature, and this close relationship is an important part of the Norwegian identity.”

**Min-On:** First of all, we would like to express our appreciation to your embassy's staff for helping us bring this Japan tour of the Norwegian Girls' Choir to fruition. Min-On is very proud to be able to introduce such a beautiful example of the choral culture of Norway to audiences across Japan. We are also pleased to be able to support your embassy's friendly event today featuring a choral exchange with a Japanese amateur chorus group.

**Minister-Counselor Bjørn Midthun:** It is indeed a great pleasure to welcome the Norwegian Girls' Choir to Japan. I really appreciate the Min-On Concert Association inviting them and facilitating their nationwide tour. We are very pleased that their performances have been so successful and have touched the hearts of people in Tohoku and elsewhere in Japan. We believe their visits to many cities across Japan will contribute further to strengthening friendship between our two countries. Even today's event, although small scale, was significant for each participant to develop people-to-people connections.

**Min-On:** I think everyone enjoyed the event, held at the lovely concert hall within the embassy.

**Mr. Midthun:** The Arctic Hall is our embassy's own multipurpose hall. It is a fantastic facility and an important asset for the embassy. The hall can be functioned for various Norway-related activities such as concerts, lectures and seminars, workshops, receptions, choir practices and so on. We also have some funding available to promote cultural exchange-type

activities, primarily for Norwegian artists to come here and show Japan what Norway can offer, but we also have some programs in place to enable Japanese journalists or people involved in cultural activities to go to Norway. One unique cultural exchange we supported was a very positive collaboration between the Norwegian Sami community and the Ainu community in Hokkaido. Both the Sami in Norway and the Ainu in Japan are indigenous people and similarly lived off the bounty of nature, following their own ethnic traditions and ways of life in the northern extremes of

Norway. Bringing a wide range of artists here to introduce Norwegian culture is one thing, but there is also the question of how we disseminate information about Norway in Japan—how we generate interest in Norway among more Japanese people.

**Min-On:** 'Harmony' has been introducing a variety of performing arts and culture unique to each country. Could you tell us about some unique part of Norwegian culture?

**Mr. Midthun:** I think one unique aspect of Norwegian culture is our closeness to nature.

We have a lot of beautiful and wild natural scenery, and only a small population. Norway and Japan are actually about the same size in terms of land area, and they share a similar topography—around 70% of the both countries are mountains, so people live mainly on the coastal plains. In Japan, you have 127 million people, but in Norway we have just five million people. So we have a lot of space—and much of that space is still untouched nature. Norwegians therefore live in close proximity to nature, and this close relationship is an important part—and one of the most distinctive features—of the Norwegian identity.



The Norwegian Girls Choir performing in their traditional national costume

their respective countries. A festival was organized in Sapporo with the participation of Sami musicians, and the Norwegian National Sami Theatre Company visited Japan for the first time last year. In complete contrast, we also had the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra here in Japan this spring; we have also had jazz musicians and even Black Metal performances, which are quite popular in

**Min-On:** Could you tell us about musical culture in Norway?

**Mr. Midthun:** Edvard Grieg is probably our most famous composer. His music really embodies nature and its sounds can be heard in the music. I think for both Norwegians and non-Norwegians alike, his music evokes images of pristine nature,

waterfalls, birdsong, flowing rivers and majestic mountains.

While Grieg was a Romantic-era classical pianist and composer, Norway also has a strong tradition of folk music—indeed Grieg drew inspiration from it and gave it international exposure. Traditional Norwegian folk music is often played on the Hardanger fiddle, or in Norwegian: *hardingfele*. Modern designs of the instrument, which is similar to a violin, have a unique feature that gives the instrument a distinctive sound: It has two sets of strings—a top set of four strings are strung and played like a regular violin, while another bottom set of four strings resonate and provide a rich echo-like sound allowing them to create quite a lot of different musical nuances unique to the music of Norway.

I would also like to mention the traditional national costumes as a unique aspect of Norwegian culture. Maybe you noticed that the members of the Norwegian Girls' Choir were wearing traditional Norwegian national costumes during their concert. Our national costume looks completely different from the beautifully elaborate Japanese kimono, but we have our own unique tradition, handicrafts and history in our national dress, which is typically worn at various celebrations and when performing folk music and dance. Each costume has a unique design of different patterns called a 'Bunad', which signifies the part of Norway the person comes from. So a Bunad expert can, by just looking at the colors and patterns, deduce precisely which area they are from. I think these are some of



A school concert (choral exchange) at the Kitanodai Junior High School in Hokkaido

the particular Norwegian aspects related to musical culture.

**Min-On:** What is the significance of the kinds of cultural exchange that Min-On has promoted for the last 50 years?

**Mr. Midthun:** Fifty years is a wonderful achievement, and I appreciate your efforts to promote cultural exchange. I completely agree that it is good to bring cultural expressions of different countries to Japan, and it is a wonderful opportunity for Japanese people to experience the cultures of other countries. And of course the reverse is also true: in Norway, I can enjoy

some Japanese performances to learn about Japanese culture. So I feel extremely positive toward such cultural exchanges, and I think the government should sponsor and support these events. It's a combination of promoting your own country, and at the same time, experiencing a cultural expression of another country. These exchanges create genuine value not only for the audiences but also for the performers. Even as a Norwegian living here in Japan, listening to the Norwegian Girls Choir and enjoying such a great cultural experience of Norway here in Japan at today's event was exciting and very moving.

## From the Editor

» At the finale of the Dixieland Jazz Festival, the Shannon Powell Traditional All-Star Jazz Band turned into a bona fide marching band. The group came down from the stage onto the floor of the concert hall and led a parade through the aisles. Many audience members, who received colorful parasols and handkerchiefs that were readied on stage, started twirling these items in the air and joyfully following the brass band in the parade. The emcee explained that the parade is called "second line," a traditional style of brass band parade in New Orleans. The parade has its origins in the "jazz funeral," which is a musical funeral march by family and friends together with a cheerful brass band performance. The idea is to celebrate the hope of life after death.

Watching the exciting parade brought to mind the remarks of jazz legend Herbie Hancock in his dialogue with Min-On founder Dr. Daisaku Ikeda on the subject of "Jazz and Black Culture." Mr.

Hancock remarked, "Jazz is a creative musical genre arising from the pain and suffering of the Black experience. African Americans were brought to the Americas to be slaves, and their connection to their traditions and heritage was severed. They were prohibited from playing their music, practicing their religions, and speaking their languages. They were not even allowed to go to school or study." He continued, "Although jazz originated in the African American experience, White musicians immediately began to play it, too. This means that jazz was a kind of music that could express the poetry of life. It revealed the ability of the human spirit to poetically express hardship and the feelings of the heart. It showed that the rhythms of jazz resonated in the hearts of all people."

Even in moments of sadness and sorrow, music can encourage people and touch their hearts. This must be another "power of music".

## From the Min-On Music Museum Collection



**Mechanical Organ "Orchestrion"**  
1900, Germany

Among mechanical organs, Welte Orchestrions were the most prestigious—the automatic musical instruments of choice for royalty and the very wealthy. The trend began in the 1850s

when Michael Welte exhibited an immense automatic pipe organ, receiving critical acclaim and numerous awards for the device.

His invention was an astounding technical achievement, and word of the huge automatic musical instrument reportedly drew crowds from near and far. The public nicknamed the instrument "orchestrion," because it successfully imitated a many-voiced orchestra. Since then, the term has come to mean any automatic musical instrument that imitates a small to large orchestral ensemble.

This "Orchestrion Welte Style 3" produces the performance of an entire orchestra. It has a complete mechanical pipe organ with 180 metal and wooden pipes, as well as drums of different sizes, triangles and other sound-making devices built into an oak cabinet of architectural elegance. Owning a fine Welte Orchestrion was a status symbol of its time, sought after by royalty, wealthy industrialists and fine commercial establishments alike.

## 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

