

harmony

Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association

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The Unique Nonverbal Korean Musical *Bibap* Premieres in Six Cities Across Japan

Musical theatre is a genre of theatrical performance that combines dialogue, acting and dancing set to various genres of music to powerfully express a dramatic narrative on stage. After musical theater became very popular through New York City productions on Broadway including *Oklahoma!*, *West Side Story* and *The Fantasticks*, these performances have become generally referred to as musicals. Today, musicals are performed not only in the United States, but also around the world in many diverse styles and languages.

Among Asian countries, Korea's musical theatre has most rapidly achieved widespread popularity. During its development in the late 20th century, Korea mostly looked to Broadway musicals for inspiration, and officially licensed, so-called 'Western musicals' were produced in Korea with technical assistance from creative teams originating in the United States. These Western musicals, originally written in English, were performed by a Korean cast for Korean audiences, with translated Korean lyrics. However, after their popularity surged

into a full-blown Korean musical boom in the early 2000s, original Korean musicals have also been produced. Furthermore, combining Korean arts from the traditional and modern eras with music, theatrical drama and other international performing arts has created new genres of musical theatre specifically unique to Korea.



The Korean 'nonverbal musical' is one of these new genres. In typical musicals, dialogue set to song is an important element in communicating the story and emotional content to the audience. However, Korean

nonverbal musicals have almost no words throughout an entire performance. Every scene and emotion is depicted through facial expressions, pantomiming, sound mimicking, a cappella and a variety of physical motion. Although initially produced by Koreans for the domestic market, because audiences can easily enjoy them without an understanding of Korean language or culture, these nonverbal musicals have attracted foreign audiences within Korea, as well as proving their potential through successful tours worldwide.

Since 1984, the Min-On Concert Association has invited a number of Korean artists and musicians to Japan, offering a wide variety of Korean cultural performances. These range from traditional music and dance to modern performing arts, including performances of the original Korean musical *Gambler* on two occasions—in 2002 and 2005. This year, to introduce this fresh and original genre of Korean performing arts to Japanese audiences, Min-On brought the Korean nonverbal musical *Bibap: Beatbox Action Comedy* to premiere in six cities across Japan.

Bibap: Beatbox Action Comedy

A New Flavor of Delicious Korean Musical



Bibap: Beatbox Action Comedy is a unique and highly entertaining Korean nonverbal musical. Its name sounds similar to Bebop—a style of jazz with complex harmonies and rhythms from the 1940s—but *Bibap* is something totally different from Bebop music. *Bibap* is indeed a brand new word, uniquely coined by combining abbreviations of three different words: *bibimbap*, a popular Korean dish of mixed vegetables and beef on rice; ‘beatbox,’ human vocal percussion that recreates myriad instruments, drum noises and sounds; and ‘B-boy,’ a style of street dance performance including hip-hop and breakdancing. *Bibap* is an unprecedented original production combining culinary arts and musical entertainment on stage. This nonverbal musical is unified through comical performances of cooking, beatboxing and B-boying all mixed together. A delicious mash-up of flavors, this musical is sure to please all your senses, just like a delicious serving of the Korean specialty dish *bibimbap*.

The entire performance of *Bibap* takes place in an onstage kitchen, where the performers are the restaurant staff and chefs that prepare a variety of dishes as orders roll in, and the audience members are customers of the *Bibap* restaurant. The performance begins with a total of eight cast members playing different characters. Some are waitresses and dishwashers, while others are chefs. Among them, two rival sous chefs—Chef Green and Chef Red—compete against each other by cooking four different dishes: sushi, pizza, chicken noodle soup and finally, *bibimbap*, from their own secret recipes. Throughout these scenes, each character employs theatrical bravado through energetic and comical use of B-boying, acrobatics and martial arts, accompanied by dynamic music and harmonious a cappella singing. Two performers specializing in beatboxing humorously mimic all the different sounds of the kitchen, including washing dishes, cutting ingredients, frying vegetables and meat,

as well as preparing and eating the famous *bibimbap*.

Audience participation is the most important part of this unique nonverbal musical comedy. From the beginning of the show, performers rush the floor with huge smiles, running through the aisles to greet customers of the *Bibap* restaurant. Some audience members are randomly selected and invited onstage, actively engaging with the Korean performers without any understanding of each other’s language. Aside from the comical and exciting scenes featuring skillful performers, impromptu scenes involving audience members really spice up the performance. The cultural experience element gives this compelling musical performance a special flavor. Since its debut on stage in Korea in 2009 and next at The Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2010—the world’s largest arts festival—this innovative and tasty musical has been well-received by audiences worldwide.



Min-On's Public Outreach Activities Continue to Inspire Youth and Adults Alike

Min-On Concert Association was founded as a nonprofit organization in 1963, and two years later, it was legally recognized as a general incorporated foundation. It contributes to many public service undertakings through outreach programs, which aim to foster the flourishing of music and art among the general public, as well as the cultivating of artistic sentiments, especially in children and young people. October 18, 2016 marked the 53rd anniversary of Min-On's first inaugural concert, held at the Bunkyo Civic Auditorium in Tokyo. That moment was the beginning of a new musical movement reaching out to everyday people. These two pages feature some of the most popular series of Min-On's admission-free outreach programs.

School Concert Series

Since its first installment in 1973, Min-On has provided admission-free concerts at primary and secondary schools throughout Japan, including remote areas—such as isolated islands and mountainous regions—to offer younger generations the opportunity to experience a rich selection of live music from artists hailing from all over the globe. Over the last 43 years, more than 1.3 million students in over 4,300 schools across Japan have enjoyed Min-On School Concerts. This photo shows veteran dance crews from Team USA on the Japan tour of *The Battle—Street Dance Competition* attending a school concert at Kiyagawa Junior High School in Yamaguchi prefecture. The students immensely enjoyed their interactions with the world-champion breakdance crews.



Special Exhibition for Children



The Min-On Music Museum has developed a permanent exhibition showcasing classical pianos, automatic musical instruments and a variety of ethnic instruments donated from performing artists or collected from countries around the world. Aside from the permanent exhibitions, it also occasionally hosts a series of specially curated exhibitions with unique musical themes. One such event that enjoys great popularity during summer vacation is an annual folk instrument exhibition specifically designed for school children. Comprising some 100 instruments, visitors can actually play the instruments during this special exhibition, giving children and parents a chance to experience international music culture. These events open their eyes to the world and nurture respect for cultural diversity.

Music Experience Workshop

The Music Museum periodically hosts various workshops, including the Music Experience Workshop for children and parents, which focuses on hand-made musical instruments and enjoys great popularity annually. With the goal of inspiring children's musical talent and knowledge, as well as deepening family ties, some 100 parents and children participate. The workshop is conducted by musical experts, who are invited to demonstrate how to create hand-made instruments out of household objects. This photo shows a father and son putting their heads together to create a hand-made instrument called a *marinkan*. Two empty cans of the same shape—one filled with water—are bound together with vinyl tape to keep the water from leaking out. Then, you can have fun listening to the sound of water flowing through the linked cans. Handcrafting a *marinkan* is that easy. The children are surprised and delighted at each creation, and the workshop is a fantastic opportunity to create rich and meaningful musical experiences, for children and parents alike.



Summer Program for Children



In addition to the annual *Folk Instruments Exhibition for Children*, another series of special programs were planned for children during summer vacation. This year, Osamu Hinata, who regularly appears on the popular kid's TV show "Singing Together with Mother," was invited to conduct an interactive mini-concert at the Melody Hall in the museum. He cheerfully performed for the pre-school and elementary school children, acting as a big brother to teach everyone singing and dancing together. To have the character from their favorite TV show performing live onstage was a special treat for everyone. Another recent special program was a workshop focused on the musical culture of Korea. Master of Korean traditional music Lee Chang Seop was invited to give an intimate lesson to children and parents on the Korean hourglass drum called *janggu*. Although the workshop was a short one, the experience of receiving a lesson from the Korean master greatly helped both children and parents to spontaneously nurture not only an appreciation for music, but also great respect for Korean culture.



Salon Concert Series

Just as salon music from Europe was originally born through small concerts occasionally held in intimate public venues, the Min-On Music Museum has periodically provided a series of admission-free mini concerts as an extension of its outreach program. These shows are staged in the grand foyer of the museum, which functions as a multi-purpose salon for guests and visitors. Although very small in scale, this casual opportunity to enjoy live music has raised the level of music appreciation amongst the general public.



Furthermore, it is a perfect chance for upcoming musicians and artists, including lesser-known international artists, to present their unique musical repertoire. The 26th installment of the salon concert series was held on October 1 this fall, featuring a collaborative performance from musician Amarjargal Dolgion, who plays a Mongolian stringed instrument called the *matouqin*, and Zorigtbaatar Bujin, a dancer. The exquisite beauty of traditional Mongolian musical culture—showcased through this special live museum exhibition—delighted the small and intimate salon audience.

Cultural Lecture Series



Another popular outreach program provided by the museum is a series of music-related cultural lectures. Cultural commentators, artists and music critics are invited to speak on various themes, often pertaining to special exhibitions held at the music museum. As outreach programs open to the general public, these lectures advocate the flourishing of music culture and performing arts. This year marked the 50th anniversary of The Beatles' first concert tour to Japan, and a cultural lecture series entitled *Looking Back Over 50 Years with The Beatles* was held at the Museum Hall this fall. Two lecturers were in attendance—Naoki Tachikawa, well-known Japanese producer and music critic, and Rumiko Hoshika, editor of *Music Life* magazine who held the first private interview with The Beatles in Japan. They were joined onstage by world-renowned trumpeter Toshinori Kondo. Each lecturer spoke on their personal experiences and unknown episodes related to the Beatles, in addition to conducting a panel discussion on various topics spanning 50 years with the band. The audience enjoyed the panel discussion greatly, as well as special performance of The Beatles' *Let it Be* from Toshinori Kondo, which drew enthusiastic applause.

Discussing the Korean Cultural Center's Wide Ranging Initiatives

Interview with Mr. Kim Hyun-Hwan, Director of the Korean Cultural Center,
Embassy of the Republic of Korea



We strongly believe that if young Japanese people gain a more solid understanding of Korean culture, the potential for positive Korea-Japan relations will be limitless.

The Korean Cultural Center in Yotsuya, Tokyo is located near the Min-On Culture Center in Shinanomachi. Under the jurisdiction of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Tokyo, it was opened in its current location by the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in May 2009. The center welcomes the general public to experience the rich traditions and history of Korea spanning over 5,000 years, and learn something new about the country through cultural activities, specialized programs, sponsored events and various learning resources. Recently, we had the opportunity to visit the Korean Cultural Center and interview the director, Mr. Kim Hyun-Hwan.

Min-On: Please introduce some of the initiatives of the Korean Cultural Center in Tokyo.

Mr. Kim Hyun-Hwan: I was appointed as director of the Korean Cultural Center in August of last year. Therefore, last year, I carried out all the activities and projects that were planned by the former administration. But beginning this year, we have promoted new initiatives planned under three major directives. The first major directive is to increase initiatives specifically geared towards youth. To that end, we've organized various exhibitions in collaboration with Japanese universities. For example, this year in May, an exhibition entitled *Korean Art in Waseda University* was held at the Korean Cultural Center in collaboration with The Waseda University Aizu Yaichi Memorial Museum. We are planning a similar cultural exhibition with Tokyo University of the Arts this fall. Additionally, in July of this year, we held a special summer vacation program, *Let's Play with Japanese Toys and K-Culture*, with the cooperation of the Tokyo Toy Museum. The Korean Cultural Center's curators engaged in making toys and reading illustrated storybooks with preschool children and elementary students. We strongly believe that if young Japanese people gain a more solid understanding of Korean culture, the potential for positive Korea-Japan relations will be limitless.

The second major directive is to carefully select exhibitions and films that focus on goodwill and friendship between Korea and Japan. For example, we selected a Korea-Japan co-produced film entitled *The Tenor* to show in Japan. It is the true story of a famous Korean tenor singer who gets thyroid cancer. He eventually loses his voice, but while receiving treatment from a Japanese doctor and trying to recover his voice with the support of a Japanese music producer, they establish a mutual friendship. After a screening of the movie at the Korean Cultural Center, the singer was invited to the podium and delivered a wonderful speech about the importance of his new relationships. This movie was also screened at the National Diet of Japan. Furthermore,



we are scheduled to organize a screening of the film, followed by a talk from him, at the National Press Club in Tokyo. Further promoting films of this nature makes a profound impression on both Korean and Japanese people, compelling them to nurture mutual understanding and friendship in their own lives.

Lastly, our third directive aims to transcend unilaterally introducing Korean culture, in order to promote bilateral initiatives contributing to

the benefit of Japanese people in need. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, we could not hold any K-Pop contests or Korean language speech contests; however, we were able to resume those events this year. Now, after the Great Earthquake in Kumamoto prefecture, in cooperation with the Japanese government and municipal offices, we at the Korean Cultural Center have been planning rehabilitation projects to help contribute to the livelihood of Japanese people affected by tragedy.

Min-On: With the support of the Korean Cultural Center, the Korean Musical *Bibap* successfully premiered in Tokyo at Nakano San Plaza Hall, and was very well received by a capacity audience.

Mr. Kim: Actually, I also love musicals and often see them in the theatre. Personally when viewing a musical, I am always inspired by the performers' skill in singing, dancing and acting—all in the same show. Generally, the actors and actresses of musical theater haven't been on TV, so most people at home have never seen their dynamic performances. But recently, TV programs that select the best singers of a wide variety of Korean oldies and famous songs are very popular in Korea, and musical performers are often selected to appear. This is a great chance to get familiar with their amazing talents. Actually, Korean musical performers are so skilled that they deserve the reputation as some of the best

singers in Korea. In the earlier days of Korean musical theater, Western musicals imported from abroad were common. But lately, many domestic original musicals have been created and performed by Korean people, and musicals have gained popularity. To this end, the Korea Creative Content Agency under the Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism has been giving aid and promoting further development of Korean musicals and the film industry.

Min-On: That's wonderful! Lastly, please share your impression of Min-On's cultural exchange undertakings, which have been promoted for many years.

Mr. Kim: I think 'Min-On' is a wonderful concert association filled with the spirit of 'music for the people'—which is the etymological meaning of the name itself. I am impressed by your events and programs filled with the spirit of sharing real-world

experiences. For example, Min-On recently prepared a workshop focused on traditional Korean music and instruments, which was well attended by Japanese children and parents. Also, when I visited the Min-On Culture Center last year, I experienced the original sounds of music played on antique classical pianos and harpsichords on display in the Min-On Music Museum. I was so excited to hear the antique fortepiano! I don't think any other organization comes close to the amount of cultural initiatives Min-On offers. I admire Min-On's promotion of cultural initiatives, not only in Japan but for countries all over the world. In particular, I'd like to express my appreciation to Min-On for actively promoting a number of cultural exchange events with Korea. Although there were some periods of tense political climate between Korea and Japan in the past, and we could possibly encounter a politically difficult time again in the future, I believe our cultural

relationship will never fail. Indeed, the Korean Cultural Center has shared many common goals and ideals alongside the Min-On Concert Association. To our delight, Min-On has steadily dedicated their efforts to building a cultural bridge between the two countries. We value our relationship, and we hope to work together in collaboration with Min-On on important cultural and musical initiatives long into the future.



From the Editor

- » Recently, people in Japan enjoyed the Korean musical *Bibap*. Although musicals originated in the United States, this fresh new genre of Korean 'nonverbal musical' has emerged in Korea under American cultural influences. Looking back on the ancient history of Japanese cultural development, one finds a deep influence from continental Asian countries detected in various aspects of Japan's own culture, including music, performing arts and artistic techniques. A majority of these cultural influences were transmitted through or originated in the Korean Peninsula, which has served as a cultural bridge between Japan and the Asian continent. In that sense, Japan owes a debt of gratitude to Korea for the cultural influences gifted to them.
- » Min-On Founder Daisaku Ikeda has often called attention to Korea's position as Japan's cultural benefactor and encouraged cultural exchange between the two countries, to nurture friendship and mutual respect. In response, Min-On has promoted a number of cultural exchanges with Korea in an effort to solidify the cultural bridge connecting future generations of the two countries. On November 18, 2009, in recognition of his longstanding contributions to Korea-Japan friendship, the government of the Republic of Korea presented the Min-On Founder with its Hwa-Gwan Order of Cultural Merit. One of South Korea's highest national honors, it is conferred upon persons who have championed culture and art in the interest of improving national welfare.

From the Min-On Music Museum Collection

Lochmann "Original" Tubular Chime 1904, Germany

The 1880s saw the first disc music boxes that used flat discs. Demand for music boxes increased rapidly as the cumulative effects of the Industrial Revolution and the popular revolutions of the late 18th and early 19th centuries meant that music became accessible to all people instead of being an aristocratic preserve.

This Lochmann "Original" upright coin operated musical box, model 172, was manufactured in 1904 in Germany with duplex musical combs accompanied by twelve bells and a tubular chime in a beautiful oak case, and was celebrated for its superb, exceptionally rich tone. These highly desirable instruments were typically installed in public places such as bars, restaurants and clubs, attracting customers, who would drop a coin into the machine to listen to its wonderful sound.



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

