

harmony

Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association

Spring 2016

No. 20

contents

The Main Event

- 2 The China National Acrobatic Troupe Mesmerizes Audiences throughout Japan

Feature

- 3 Overseas Dispatch Renewing Friendship for Future Generations

News Update

- 4 Sväng a Study in Simplicity, Compactness and Virtuosity
- 4 INSPi and Jamaica Café Collaborate for Joint A Cappella Performance
- 5 Min-On Music Museum's Cultural Lectures, Workshops and Free Concerts

Interview

- 6 Interview with H.E. Seiko Ishikawa, Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Japan

Min-On Information

- 7 From the Editor
- 8 From the Min-On Music Museum Collection: Orthophonic Victrola VV.I-70 Disc Phonograph



Min-On



The China National Acrobatic Troupe Mesmerizes Audiences throughout Japan

In this beautiful Japanese spring season, the Min-On Concert Association presented a spectacular performance by the China National Acrobatic Troupe through the support of the Chinese Embassy in Tokyo. Their nationwide tour, including a total of 53 shows in 27 cities across Japan, began on March 3 in Kanagawa prefecture and concluded on April 26 in Fukuoka prefecture. By further promoting Sino-Japanese friendship, the successful tour brought a sense of fulfillment to everyone involved.

Chinese acrobatics is called *zaji* in Chinese, literally “a variety of skills,” and its history of over 2,000 years makes it one of the oldest forms of performing arts. *Zaji* stemmed from people’s daily life and labor activities, involving tools and articles such as ladders, plates, bowls, poles, tridents, ropes, whips, umbrellas and more. Originally, these

labor skills and special techniques were demonstrated as leisure, but over time they reached a remarkable level of quality and refinement as acrobatic performance. This evolution of casual exhibition of labor skills into a performing arts style was named *baixi*—literally “a variety show of one hundred skills”—and occurred during the Han Dynasty. It has been greatly beloved by the people of China ever since.

The China National Acrobatic Troupe was founded in 1950. It is highly acclaimed, having been awarded over 60 gold medals in major competitions at home and abroad. The troupe has visited more than 120 countries to date as a cultural bridge, proudly continuing the mission of international cultural exchange entrusted to them by the late Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai.

Min-On has previously sponsored their Japan tour twice—in *Legends of the Dragon and the Phoenix* in 2007 and *The King of Acrobatics* in 2010—featuring the sublime beauty of their Chinese acrobatics. For this third tour, the Troupe has created a unique new production entitled *Be Brilliant! Master Chef Panda*, which combines Chinese acrobatics with comedy and drama. The story involves the main character “Panda” trying to become a brilliant master chef in the face of numerous challenges. In witty and humorous scenes of his journey, the Troupe demonstrates their indomitable spirit through highly difficult acrobatic maneuvers and exceptional physical strength. Entertaining crowds with elegance and the magnificent novelty of their distinctive performing arts, the China National Acrobatic Troupe impressed audiences at every venue across Japan.

Overseas Dispatch Renewing Friendship for Future Generations

“The basis of genuine world peace will be formed by the fostering of a mutual understanding through a grass-roots exchange that transcends distinctions of race, nation and ideology. To this end, exchanges in art and culture will be indispensable. Music, dance and works of art occupy a dimension that transcends borders.” This is one of guiding principles for Min-On’s undertakings of international cultural exchange shared by the founder, Daisaku Ikeda.

In addition to inviting leading musicians from around the world since 1965, Min-On launched a program of overseas Japanese artist dispatches as a major part of its cultural exchange undertakings in 1966. To date, Min-On has organized more than 700 overseas performances introducing Japanese culture to 19 countries through music, theater and performing arts. At the end of 2015, commemorating the 50th anniversary of its cultural exchange program, Min-On dispatched groups of young, talented Japanese artists to China and Russia to renew long-standing friendships with both countries.

For the overseas dispatch to the People’s Republic of China, Min-On formed a special troupe of Japanese performing artists, consisting of Hiromi Yamaguchi, a top

female Japanese enka singer, Yoshiyuki Kasai, a winner of the 2015 International Tsugaru Shamisen Championship, the dance troupe “Wakatake,” the Japanese taiko drumming troupe “TAKERU” and the traditional folk dance group “NIPPON.” The groups were dispatched together to Beijing from November 9 through 11 for a special performance entitled the “Brilliance of the Four Seasons—Poetic Sentiment of Japan” on three university campuses: Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing City University and China University of International Relations. Despite the current political climate, every venue was filled to capacity with university students and faculty members as well as the public. Each member of the cultural envoy from Japan successfully accomplished their mission of further deepening mutual understanding and strengthening heart-to-heart ties of people between the two nations.

In the second cultural dispatch to the Russian Federation, Min-On sent three talented young Japanese musicians to Moscow as the second installment of the Min-On Global Music Network program from December 9 through 11. The musicians included young virtuoso flutist Seiya Ueno, who is the grand-prix winner of the 2008

Jean-Pierre Rampal International Flute Competition, world-leading young pianist Kanon Matsuda, who won the grand prix at the International Edvard Grieg Piano Competition in Moscow at age 7, and young distinguished *shamisen* player Chikudo Takahashi, who is considered the last live-in apprentice of legendary *shamisen* master Chikuzan Takahashi. The group of young Japanese artists, together with two other promising young musicians—Russian cellist Fedor Amosov, who was honored with special prize at the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition, and violinist Ruslan Turuntaev from Kazakhstan, who won first prize at the 2014 International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians—gave a joint performance under the theme of “Let’s create the sensation of music” at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Moscow State University and the Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia. In the finale at Moscow State University, the audience and students of the music department joined in enthusiastic singing of a Russian song celebrating the joy and power of music. Through these spirited cultural dispatches, Min-On and the young artists renewed these international friendships for many generations to come.



Brilliance of the Four Seasons showcases a variety of Japanese performing arts in Beijing, China



Young Japanese musicians perform at Moscow State University

Sväng a Study in Simplicity, Compactness and Virtuosity

The concert began with a quiet entrance of four gentlemen dressed in three-piece suits without neckties, carrying briefcases in hand. After lining up at center stage, each of them unclasped their briefcases simultaneously, and brought out small, box-like instruments, all different in shape and size.

They are the Finnish harmonica quartet, Sväng. The group was formed in 2003 at the initiative of Jouko Kyhälä, who graduated from the Sibelius Academy with a major in harmonica and later became the first Doctor of Harmonica Arts in Helsinki. Dr. Kyhälä plays the rare chord harmonica “Harmonetta,” while Eero Turkka and Eero Grundström—also graduates of the Sibelius Academy—play chromatic and diatonic harmonicas. Pasi Leino, the eldest quartet member, plays the ultimate low bass harmonica, which is the largest of them all. Each member is not only a superb harmonica soloist, but also a multi-instrumentalist, composer and master improviser. Sväng is an unprecedented quartet in terms of simplicity, compactness and deep musical capacity.

With the support of the embassy of Finland in Tokyo, Min-On invited Sväng to deliver their extraordinary harmonica performance to Japanese audiences in five cities in early spring, 2016. Tetsuya Kuwayama, who is the only Japanese player of the Belgian button accordion (also categorized as a free-reed instrument alongside the harmonica) served as guest emcee, explaining the features of harmonica music and each different harmonica to the Japanese



audiences. The versatile and slightly comical quartet showcased a wide-ranging repertoire of tango, pop and folk music, as well as ragtime, Chopin’s classics, Sibelius’ masterpieces and Japanese children’s songs, not to mention Sväng’s original compositions, all performed with harmonicas only. At every venue, the audience was captivated by their incredible technique and fascinated by the great artistry of the sophisticated harmonica sound.

INSPi and Jamaica Café Collaborate for Joint A Cappella Performance

A Cappella is the musical term that describes a genre of music, specifically solo or group singing without any musical accompaniment. An a cappella singer once told us in an interview, “What fascinates me about a cappella is that it’s music made by nothing more than the human voice.” They continued to say, “Singing is the first music that humankind experienced, the voice was the first musical instrument; it is given equally to all human beings, regardless of their individual differences. Therefore, vocal music is particularly good at connecting

people and touching people more naturally than musical instruments.”

The Japanese popular vocal group INSPi—an a cappella group consisting of six male singers—has taken to the stage in the Min-On School Concert Series, including a series of the *Tohoku Hope Concerts* held in the Tohoku region after the Great East Japan Earthquake and subsequent tsunami in 2011, to encourage people in the area through their beautiful harmony and dynamic vocal performance.

Jamaica Café is the longest running a cappella group in Indonesia, established in 1991 by a group of friends at Gonzaga High School in South Jakarta. The name Jamaica Café was selected as a salute to Jamaica, the home of reggae—the genre of music they loved to sing at the time. Café refers to the high school canteen where they often gathered after school to jam.

These two a cappella groups collaborated onstage in 2015 at a concert in Indonesia after the Sumatra earthquake. Min-On invited both groups again for a series of joint a cappella Concerts entitled “Voices Sing in Harmony Connecting our Hearts,” held across five cities in Japan in mid-March, featuring a wide-ranging repertoire of jazz, reggae, classics and pop—as well as each group performing the other country’s folk songs. Their vocal artistry and sensitive, harmonious a cappella performance created a deep heart-to-heart connection with the audience at every venue.



Min-On Music Museum's Cultural Lectures, Workshops and Free Concerts

The Min-On Music Museum is one of only a handful of music museums in the world. Located in Shinanomchi, Tokyo, this valuable repository of musical artifacts houses over 300,000 items, including antique pianos, music boxes and various ethnic instruments displayed in a permanent exhibition, as well as a large collection of musical reference materials and recordings available to the public in its library. In 2012, the museum opened a second location in the international city of Kobe. Across both locations, the Min-On Music Museums have been visited by nearly 2 million people to date. In addition to exhibitions and library activities, the Min-On Music Museum contributes to the flourishing of music and art through outreach programs open to the general public, in the form of music-related cultural lectures, workshops and admission-free mini concerts.

Since the beginning of this year celebrating the 260th anniversary of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's birth, the western Japan branch of the museum in Kobe hosted a series of four cultural lectures entitled "Unknown Marvels of Mozart." The first installment in the lecture series was delivered by composer and music producer Toshihiko Tsuura on January 24—three days prior to Mozart's 260th birthday—at the Kansai International Culture Center, which houses the Kobe

location of the museum. A capacity audience in the auditorium was inspired by Mozart's unknown life story full of struggle and wonder.



"Unknown Marvels of Mozart" lecture given by Toshihiko Tsuura

Additionally, this spring, in cooperation with master conductor of the Shinano Chorus, Keigo Sasaguchi, the Music Museum sponsored a series of three workshops for amateur choral instructors

at the Museum Hall in Tokyo. The popular workshop designed for beginners provided inspiring, friendly lectures on instructing choral methods of vocalization and expression. The participants in attendance enjoyed learning the basics of conducting choral performance.

Two years ago, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of its founding, the Min-On Music Museum initiated a new series of mini concerts entitled Min-On Music Museum Salon Concerts. They were staged in the Melody Hall, its grand foyer functioning as a multi-purpose salon for guests and visitors. Just as the genre of European salon music was born through small concerts of exquisite chamber music held in comfortable and intimate salons, the Music Museum has provided admission-free concerts to raise the level of music appreciation in Japan. In turn, this has nurtured upcoming musicians and artists through casual opportunities to present their work. The first salon concert this year was held on February 6, featuring a collaborative performance of Japanese *sangen* player Hiroka Takeda, flutist Mari Fukayama and Japanese *koto* player Naoichi Tanaka. The exquisite beauty of traditional Japanese music delighted the small audience attending the intimate salon venue that Saturday afternoon.



Venezuela's Diversity Thrives in Japan and Worldwide

Interview with **H.E. Seiko Ishikawa**, Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Japan



We all have basic needs like food, shelter and healthcare. But if we cannot satisfy our spiritual needs, we cannot become fully conscious as human beings.

Min-On: We deeply appreciate your continuous support of Min-On's cultural undertakings. In particular, we have been greatly honored by your presence at many Min-On cultural exchange concerts. First, please share your impressions of our cultural activities.

Ambassador Seiko Ishikawa: Thank you. Although I haven't been able to attend all of Min-On's invitations, I have seen many performances. I truly enjoy the variety of initiatives that Min-On provides, and the enthusiasm of the audience always fascinates me. Min-On always makes a perfect match by inviting the best international artists and musicians and assembling audiences interested in them.

Min-On: We are very happy to introduce Guaco onstage to Japanese audiences this coming autumn. They are one of the best bands from Venezuela and a Grammy award winner. Please tell us briefly about Guaco.

Ambassador: Guaco is one of the most successful bands in Venezuela. They have a long history of blending different genres of traditional Venezuelan music. Also, they blend them together with many international genres. In that sense, they have created brand new, unique genres of music. They each have a different name, but collectively they're referred to as "music from Guaco." People have known about them for some time, but they haven't necessarily understood the new genres they create.

I would also like to mention that in fact, one of the most well known Latin American songs in the world is from Venezuela. In Japan, this song is known as "Coffee Rumba." It is very popular not only in Japan, but also worldwide. This song represents an original genre that was created in Venezuela. I think that anyone who hears the melody would immediately recognize it.

We are very pleased that Min-On will present these unique Venezuelan genres of music through Guaco's performance in Japan. When I arrived in Japan as an ambassador a long time ago, I asked

some music specialists what the most sought after form of Venezuelan music was. They all said that "music from Guaco" was easily number one. That's one of the reasons I've always hoped they would come to Japan someday. Finally, it will become a reality! Thank you to Min-On for your kind efforts to organize Guaco's Japan tour.

Min-On: That's wonderful! Next, please tell us briefly about Venezuelan culture in general.

Ambassador: Venezuela is a country that lives by its geography and nature. We are a blend of different regions within South America. We have influences from the rain, from the mountains and from the sea—they have all shaped the character of Venezuelans. We are an open-minded people, and have received others from different parts of the world with open arms.

Our unique cultural blend of Incans, Africans, Europeans and Asians has formed an iconic heritage that is manifest through music, art and cultural performance. From the mid-19th century through the 20th century, a lot of talented musicians and artists immigrated to our country. As top musicians and artists of Venezuela, they began to enrich our own Venezuelan culture. And as I mentioned earlier, they began blending different genres and creating unique music. This created a certain complexity in categorizing the musical culture of Venezuela, and because so many different genres of music exist, it makes it very complex to study what is really Venezuelan. But I think this complexity is the true beauty of Venezuelan culture.

Min-On: We'd like to ask about your wife, who is a professional singer that dedicates her voice to many charitable concerts. Please share your thoughts on her work.

Ambassador: Thank you. My wife Erica came from a family of musicians. Her father is originally from Belgium. He immigrated to Venezuela many years ago and became president of the most famous classical music university in Venezuela, which he ran for over 13 years



(left) Costa Caribe y Ensemble Gurruffio in September, 1991; (right) Coral Capella de Caracas in July, 1980

with great success. He is also a composer. Her mother is a soprano singer. Eventually, Erica went to the Royal Academy of Music in England and became a soprano singer herself. Thus, she inherited her passion for music from her parents. I am very proud of her work, because she is devoted to music not only in a commercial sense, but also from a spiritual perspective. The music *Ave Maria* was composed by her father and dedicated to the Marian statue at the church of Urakami in Nagasaki, which was destroyed by the atomic bombing in 1945 and later restored. She has

been singing this composition as a symbol of unity, a sincere prayer for long-standing peace. We believe it is very much in sync with the efforts of Min-On and its founder Mr. Daisaku Ikeda. She has devoted herself to spread the message of peace, not only in Japan, but also around the world through her concert activities.

Min-On: Lastly, if you have any comments on the power of music, please share them.

Ambassador: It is very important to realize

that music and art have a unique power to unite people worldwide beyond race, religion, borders or geography. This power is not only prevalent through the enjoyment of music, but also through nurturing of the soul and spirit. We all have basic needs like food, shelter, healthcare, etc. But if we cannot satisfy our spiritual needs, we cannot become fully conscious as human beings. Music nurtures the spirit in order for us to grow as people and citizens, bringing positive light to this world. I believe that growth ultimately connects to long-standing peace.

From the Editor

» Looking back on the history of Min-On's cultural undertakings, the first-ever overseas dispatch of Japanese artists was to the United States in June 1966, just 20 years after the end of the war between the two countries. At that time, people in both countries did not yet recognize or appreciate the profound significance of Min-On's undertakings on global society. For example, the production *Holiday in Tokyo*, introducing King's Roar Orchestra—one of Japan's first jazz bands—pop singer Hiroshi Moriya, Japanese folksong singer Fumiyo Fujimoto and classical Japanese dancer Kikunori Onoe, premiered in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Honolulu. Unexpectedly, it was enjoyed by a full house of many locals, including Japanese Americans. Only six months after the great success of the first US tour, another group of top-name Japanese stars and artists was dispatched again to the United States. Min-On is proud of these popular performances held 50 years ago, which helped lay the foundation for the cultural exchange and close friendship that continues today between the United States and Japan.

» The normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and China was realized in 1972, and since then, political and economic relations have developed in various degrees between the two countries. In 1974, Min-On Founder Daisaku Ikeda visited China and spoke with the late Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai towards the realization of friendly China-Japan relations, and in 1975, Min-On initiated a series of Sino-Japanese cultural exchanges. Since then, Min-On has continued to organize cultural exchange almost every year under varying economic and political climates between the two countries. Daisaku Ikeda once said, "My mentor, the late Josei Toda, also emphasized the importance of cultural exchange. He often said that political and economic relations are ruled by calculations of power or gain, making them unstable and ephemeral, whereas exchange in the realm of culture is more enduring. Respect for other cultures leads to respect for the people of those cultures. The friendship that grows from such a sentiment becomes an indestructible foundation for lasting peace."

From the Min-On Music Museum Collection



phonograph that Edison had originally developed, and by 1907 its sales began to surpass those of the Edison cylinder.

Disc records were longer playing and easier to store, but Edison resisted them due to his belief that cylinder recordings sounded superior. Meanwhile, the Victor Company produced a number of popular disc phonographs, and as a consequence, Edison's phonograph business never regained its former prominence. Edison withdrew from the phonograph business completely in 1929, and at the same time, Victor's disc players—most notably the Victrolas—began to dominate the market.

This "Orthophonic Victrola VV.1-70" disc phonograph was manufactured in the USA in 1926 by the Victor Company. Although dubbed "hornless" by its manufacturer, the horn was in fact built into the cabinet. The Victrola series played a key role in popularizing the use of phonographs at home, and the "Victrola" name continued to be used until the 1970s.

Disc Phonograph
Orthophonic Victrola VV.1-701926
U.S.A.

Edison first developed a disc phonograph in 1878. But it was Emile Berliner, not Edison, who developed the commercial disc machine known as the gramophone. Later, the Victor Talking Machine Company marketed the disc

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

