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Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association

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The climax of a scene from *Journey to the West*—the monkey king Su Wukong captures the leopard monster Jin Qianbao

Performance of Classical Chinese Opera Masterpieces Mesmerizes Japanese Audiences

This year, to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between Japan and the People's Republic of China in 1972, the Min-On Concert Association invited the internationally acclaimed China National Peking Opera Company to Japan for a two-month-long nationwide tour of a special production entitled *A Selected Three of the Most Prestigious Peking Opera Masterpieces—Great Epics of Justice, Love and Gratitude*.

The China National Peking Opera Company (CNPOC) is one of the most distinguished performing art ensembles directly under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China. Based in Beijing, it was founded in January 1955 with the legendary Mei Lanfang—one of the most celebrated Peking opera artists in modern history—as its first president.

In 2002, Min-On was the first to introduce the CNPOC to Japanese audiences with its performance of the *Peking Opera Omnibus*. Since then, Min-On has collaborated with the CNPOC to bring a variety of Peking opera productions to Japan, in 2006, 2009 and 2014.

This year's tour marks the fifth time to bring the performance of authentic Peking opera by the CNPOC to Japanese audiences.



A famous scene from *Yang Yuhuan and Emperor Xuanzong of Tang*

Group One—the CNPOC's leading troupe featuring actor Yu Kuizhi, the company's vice president and artistic director, as well as Li Shengsu, the head of Group One and the very best of the best in the company—presented the most famous scenes from three selected classical masterpieces in Japan: *Journey to the West*, *Yang Yuhuan and Emperor Xuanzong of Tang* and *Suo Lin Nang: An Embroidered Treasure Pouch*.

Every one of the 52 engagements at 28 venues across Japan attracted a capacity audience. The performance at Tokyo's Nakano Sun Plaza Hall on April 12 was attended by H.E. Cheng Yonghua, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China, along with ambassadors and diplomats from 34 other countries. Although political and economic relations between Japan and the People's Republic of China have been at a low ebb in recent years, members of the China National Peking Opera Company proved themselves skilled cultural diplomats, fulfilling their mission of cultural exchange and returning home to Beijing in the knowledge that Sino-Japanese friendship and goodwill was strengthened.

Interview with Artistic Directors Yu Kuizhi and Li Shengsu of the China National Peking Opera Company (CNPOC)



Yu Kuizhi, Vice President of CNPOC



Li Shengsu, Head of Group One of CNPOC

Min-On: This is the fifth time for the CNPOC to be invited to Japan for a nationwide tour by the Min-On Concert Association. Please tell us about the CNPOC.

Mr. Yu Kuizhi: The China National Peking Opera Company has a long history of cultural exchange with Japan, going back to the time of our first president, the legendary Mei Lanfang. There are a variety of important elements in the performance of Peking Opera, including mastering the four main skills essential for performers to captivate an audience: song, speech, dance acting and combat. Dance acting includes pure acting, pantomime and other types of dancing, and combat includes both acrobatics and fighting scenes with different kinds of weaponry. Each performer fully utilizes these four skills and exhaustively showcases their mastery of Peking Opera performance—the pinnacle of performing arts.

Min-On: For this tour, you present a special production entitled *A Selected Three of the Most Prestigious Peking Opera Masterpieces—Great Epics of Justice, Love and Gratitude*.

Ms. Li Shengsu: Yes. The first is *Journey to the West*, one of the most popular Chinese classical masterpieces, which is well known even in Japan as an exciting story of the monkey king Sun Wukong. For this tour, we selected one of the scenes from *Journey to the West* entitled *Jin Qianbao*—the monkey king's battle against the leopard monster Jin Qianbao—and perhaps Japanese people do not know much about the scene. This scene displays difficult combat techniques, such as Jin Qianbao's masterful skill with the spear, which can only be attained through dedicated, rigorous training. It is truly a great epic of justice.

Mr. Yu Kuizhi: The second masterpiece is *Yang Yuhuan and Emperor Xuanzong of Tang*—a very famous love story of the Emperor Xuanzong of Tang and his favorite concubine, Consort Yang Yuhuan. It is a great epic of love, a monumental work lasting more than three hours on stage. Thus, we selected just one famous scene, the reciting of *The Song of Everlasting Regret*, which is one of the most popular poems from the Tang Dynasty written by the legendary poet Bai Ju-Yi. Please note the virtuoso skill in song and speech by the performers in this beautiful scene.

Min-On: Tell us about *Suo Lin Nang: An Embroidered Treasure Pouch*.

Ms. Li Shengsu: During the second performance, *Yang Yuhuan and Emperor Xuanzong of Tang*, you will probably be drawn to the high-pitched voices of song and speech, but in the performance of *Suo Lin Nang: An Embroidered*

Treasure Pouch, you should notice more depth and complexity in song and speech. Also, please enjoy the flowing and elegant styles of dance acting, accented by the long trailing sleeves of the costumes. The story of *Suo Lin Nang* focuses on the fabric of human relationships, and also exemplifies the ups and downs of human life. While enjoying this performance, the audience will learn the importance of realizing that people live interdependently and help and assist one another.

Min-On: When did you begin your careers as performing artists?

Mr. Yu Kuizhi: We both entered the world of Peking Opera at the age of ten. We enrolled in a specialized Peking Opera school, studied the basic theories of drama and received fundamental training, which was physically strenuous. The classroom study was also strict, but we would rather attend class compared to the grueling physical sessions. Many Chinese actors come from a background of Peking Opera, learning at similar schools. For example, the action movie star Jackie Chan also came from a Peking Opera background. Although many young people enter the world of Peking Opera at one time, the China National Peking Opera Company is a direct gate leading to a career. And only five or six people selected from all of China are allowed to enter each year.

Min-On: Please share your impressions of this tour to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan.

Mr. Yu Kuizhi: As someone who has been involved in cultural exchange for many years, joining this Japan tour to fulfill our mission is a distinct honor. China and Japan have a relationship stretching back to ancient times, and it is vital to continue mutual exchange of culture and arts, no matter our economic and political climates. The people of China recognize and sincerely appreciate the dedication of the Min-On Concert Association and its founder, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, for promoting so many cultural exchange opportunities to deepen mutual understanding and strengthen our relationship. In that sense, I sincerely wish to reiterate my great admiration for the founder's faithfulness to the late Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, working towards the realization of friendly China-Japan relations. Also, my deepest gratitude goes towards Min-On's untiring efforts and accomplishments over the past 40 years.



A scene from *Suo Lin Nang: An Embroidered Treasure Pouch*

Overseas Dispatches of Japanese Artists to Singapore and China

Min-On Concert Association has played a major role in introducing Japanese culture and performing arts to other countries for the last half century. Since 1966, Min-On has promoted a program of overseas dispatches of Japanese artists, mirroring its program of inviting leading musicians and artists from around the world to Japan. To date, Min-On has sent Japanese musicians, dancers and artists to 19 countries for more than 700 performances spanning Japanese musical, theatrical and performing arts culture. Here we feature some of the most recent overseas dispatches to Singapore and the People's Republic of China.



Performance at Esplanade—Theatres on the Bay in Singapore

Singapore

Last year marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Singapore. To commemorate this milestone, a series of festivities was organized by the two countries' governments, further deepening the positive relationship between them. Following the success of the first two installments of the Min-On Global Music Network programs in Korea and Russia, Min-On dispatched for the third installment a group of nine talented young Japanese musicians and artists to Singapore. Among them were a pianist, violinist and cellist for a classical music performance, as well as a *shakuhachi* flutist, a Tsugaru *shamisen* player, a *taiko* drummer, a dancer and two Japanese *koto* players for a traditional Japanese performance.

Celebrating the auspicious occasion, the admission-free cultural exchange concert—on the theme of “The Heart of Japan”—was

held from September 16 through 20, 2016, at four different venues in Singapore. The first was held at the National University of Singapore's Cultural Centre Theatre. Here, six young Singaporean musicians joined the Min-On group, providing an opportunity to deepen the bond of friendship between youth of the two countries. On the last day of the tour, the final concert was held at one of the largest entertainment complexes in Singapore: Esplanade—Theatres on the Bay. The unique cultural exchange program celebrating the two countries' strong relationship included traditional Japanese music, dance and classical music, as well as soundtracks from popular Japanese anime and drama. This vibrant, diverse selection presented on a waterfront stage against the scenic backdrop of Marina Bay enthralled an audience of over two thousand, including official guests from the government of Singapore.

The People's Republic of China

An overseas dispatch was once again organized in 2016 to visit the People's Republic of China. Min-On formed a special troupe of Japanese

performing artists, including the Japanese dance and *taiko* drum troupe, ASKA. They were accompanied by individuals specializing in traditional Japanese instruments, including the *shakuhachi* and *shinobue* flutes, the *koto* harp and the Tsugaru *shamisen*. This special troupe performed Japanese music and dance onstage from October 24 to 26 for hundreds of students, faculty members, staff and public attendees at three university campuses—Dalian Art College, Liaoning Normal University and Dalian Polytechnic University—in Liaoning Province in northeastern China.

The passionate, powerful performance by the Japanese *taiko* drum troupe ASKA captivated the audience with thunderous and dynamically choreographed drumming. They were accompanied by a demon character who stalked the theater floor, mesmerizing audience members, drawing wide smiles and much applause.

This special cultural envoy from Japan successfully accomplished its mission: to deepen mutual understanding and strengthen heart-to-heart ties between the people of Japan and China.



The Japanese dance and taiko drum group ASKA in China

City of London Sinfonia and Charlotte de Rothschild Inspire All

Since its inaugural concert in 1963, the Min-On Concert Association has hosted a great number of classical music performances, featuring many well-known orchestras, eminent conductors, distinguished soloists and choirs invited from within Japan and all over the globe.

This spring, with the support of the British Council, Min-On proudly invited one of the United Kingdom's leading orchestras, the City of London Sinfonia, for their very first Japan tour. In collaboration with the distinguished British lyric soprano Charlotte de Rothschild and an internationally acclaimed clarinet player, the orchestra toured Japan under the guidance of Principal Conductor Michael Collin.

The City of London Sinfonia (CLS) has brought their outstanding musicianship to the stage mainly in the UK, but also occasionally across the world. They perform classical music, but are also well known as pioneers across a wide range of exciting and creative styles, inspiring and moving audiences through genre-bending collaborations in the world of dance, film, theater, visual art, spoken word and more. CLS is also a pioneering orchestra in the field of community outreach, including projects known as "Meet the Music," "Growth through Music" and "Wellbeing through Music." These programs are dedicated to delivering concerts to a wide



range of communities, including children in schools and patients in hospitals. Besides their superb musicianship, the Min-On Concert Association has great admiration for CLS's outreach concert activities, which are aligned with Min-On's own guiding principles. It was an honor to finally realize their prestigious performance for Japanese audiences this year.

The British diva Charlotte de Rothschild, who has performed as a soloist in recitals organized by Min-On on four previous occasions in Japan, was also invited this spring, singing traditional Japanese *kakyoku* songs alongside the City of London Sinfonia. She started her career singing Japanese *kakyoku* nearly twenty-five years ago. Critics

have praised her, saying that she can sing *kakyoku* with warm emotion and sensibility—perhaps even better than Japanese singers.

It was a long-standing goal of Charlotte and the CLS to engage with Japanese culture through the distinctive and meaningful form of Japanese *kakyoku* orchestral arrangements, delivering their collaborative performance to Japanese communities. Their performances of Japanese *kakyoku*, with a true Japanese sensibility—as well as their English repertoire—utterly captivated capacity audiences at every venue. They contributed to further strengthening the well-established friendship between Japan and the United Kingdom.

Canzone Napoletana Gifts the Italian Musical Tradition to Japan

Most Japanese people are probably familiar with the melodies of the Italian songs *O Sole Mio*, *Torna a Surriento* and *Funiculì Funiculà*. Hearing these songs immediately reminds us of the dynamic country of Italy.

Indeed, they are all very popular Neapolitan songs from Naples, Italy—one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Naples has played a vibrant role in the Italian music world and has greatly influenced other European musical traditions over the centuries. By the 1800s, Naples was filled with many famous composers' workshops. It went on to become the birthplace of Neapolitan opera and home to many of the finest musical theaters in the world. From the late 19th century onwards, the history of Naples as the musical capital of Italy supported the vitality of Neapolitan popular music, which became known worldwide as *Canzone Napoletana*.

Min-On has a long history of cultural exchange with Italy and has hosted a number of Italian concerts in Japan, including *Canzone Napoletana*. The first was in 1974 with legendary singer Bobby Solo, followed by a series of virtuoso *Canzone* performances by the famous Aurelio Fierro. This year, Min-On invited Aurelio's son, Fabrizio Fierro,

and grandson, Aurelio Fierro Jr., accompanied by their orchestra from Italy to deliver an exciting performance *Viva Italia!—The Best Selection of Fascinating Canzone Napoletana* to lively audiences in 10 cities across Japan.



Tradition, Innovation, and Gateway – Three Keywords Linking the Collective Future of Denmark and Japan

Interview with **H.E. Freddy Svane**, Ambassador of the the Kingdom of Denmark

Culture can be mutually beneficial among individuals, companies and countries, and at the same time, nurture peace, harmony and stability.



Min-On: First of all, we would like to express our warmest appreciation for your recent courtesy visit to the Min-On Culture Center and Music Museum. Can you please give your impression of your visit?

Ambassador Freddy Svane: Thank you very much for the warm welcome everyone extended during my visit to the Min-On Culture Center. I was genuinely surprised to see your collection of very old pianofortes and harpsichords at the music museum—it is an outstanding exhibition. I have never seen anything like that anywhere in the world. And, of course, to witness someone playing those antique instruments live was a historic moment for me. Especially when listening to the delicate sound of the antique harpsichord, I spontaneously recalled my experiences listening to old phonograph recordings. It was truly a touching experience. It must be very difficult to maintain those several centuries-old instruments in viable condition and keep them well tuned. I praise your dedication to not only protecting these precious instruments for lovers of music and art, but also preserving such important world heritage for the sake of humanity. I was very pleased to visit you and sincerely enjoyed the precious cultural heritage you preserve.

Min-On: Thank you so much for the heartfelt compliment. You may have also attended various concerts and cultural programs in Japan, including those organized by the Min-On Concert Association. If you have any comments on those cultural activities, please share them with us.

that we are commonly able to understand. This furthers the reasoning for why we should introduce people of different cultures to each other through music and art across ethnic and national borders. I think that this is needed now more than ever before.



Virtuoso flutist András Andorján from Denmark touring in Japan

I also believe listening to music spontaneously makes people feel happy. It is rare to see two true lovers of music arguing and fighting with each other, I believe. Musical culture is universal and an important part of our global DNA. Finally, I think places where people are more exposed to music and culture have fewer problems.

Min-On: Those are exactly the same principles that we adhere to. For the last fifty-some years, Min-On has developed mutual understanding and respect among people of different races and nationalities through the global exchange of musical culture, inviting musicians and artists from 105 countries to date. Actually, this year we've added three more countries: Bahrain, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Nicaragua.

Ambassador: I think Japanese people have a very strong interest in art, not only Japanese art but also Western art, and even global art. We all know that art and music are forms of human expression, and I believe that we are all naturally able to perceive that expression through a piece of art or music. This is because art and music are a kind of universal language

Ambassador: That's wonderful! We also hope and expect to introduce the music and culture of Denmark to the Japanese people one day. Min-On has pioneered an important platform for a cultural exchange. Such events give us a way to introduce our own country's unique culture to people

around the world. Even though I am from Denmark, a European country, I may not have any idea about the music from Bosnia-Herzegovina—even though it is another European country. That said, I cannot imagine how the music from Bahrain sounds at all. The world has been morphing at high speed into something we've never seen before—constant new technologies, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and so on. This is why, I think, culture must play a more and more important role in our future. With more opportunities for cultural exchange, we can develop mutual understanding between different countries. Eventually, this will achieve peace and harmony to reign over our world.

Min-On: A fantastic notion, your Excellency! Lastly, since this year marks the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Denmark and Japan, if your embassy has any special programs

planned for the celebration, please tell us about them.

Ambassador: Yes, of course, it is my great pleasure to talk about the celebration. Of course, we must celebrate the past 150 years of successful and friendly ties between our two countries. Yet, we want to focus on the next 150 years in order to further develop bonds of friendship for the sake of the future. In that context, we have identified three keywords for the celebration. They are *tradition, innovation and gateway*.

Tradition relates directly to culture. In both Denmark and Japan, there are deep-rooted cultural traditions. We need to maintain them, nurturing those cultural values for the sake of the future. The second is innovation; in other words, creativity. We all know that creativity is a great force driving the future of our world. Last but not least, gateways are imperative for connecting our two countries

and the world. Geographically speaking, Japan and Denmark stand very far apart—indeed, thousands of kilometers from each other. But by improving the convenience of our common gateways, we can further promote people-to-people exchange between the two countries.

Focusing on these three keywords, we will plan and prepare a variety of celebration events. I believe that our celebration of the 150th anniversary should serve as a role model for proving the value of cultural exchange. It will prove that culture can be mutually beneficial among individuals, companies and countries, and at the same time, nurture peace, harmony and stability. We have achieved what we wanted thus far, and it's our responsibility to commit ourselves to further strengthening the bonds of goodwill and friendship between Denmark and Japan. Thank you very much.

From the Editor

» This year marks the 45th anniversary of the normalization of Japan-China diplomatic relations. During the interview with the directors of the China National Peking Opera Company, Mr. Yu Kuizhi remarked, "I sincerely wish to reiterate my great admiration for the founder's faithfulness to the late Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, working towards the realization of friendly China-Japan relations." Indeed, Min-On founder Daisaku Ikeda, then president of the Soka Gakkai, issued a bold proposal for the normalization in 1968 that significantly helped to establish the groundwork for a series of political exchanges with China. After the restoration of diplomatic relations in 1972, he visited the People's Republic of China in 1974 and met with Premier Zhou towards developing an unbreakable bond of Sino-Japanese friendship. The following year in 1975, at the initiative of the founder, Min-On launched an annual series of cultural exchange with China. Since then, a total of more than 1,500 public performances in Japan by various Chinese performing artists and groups, including the CNPOC, have been brought to fruition. More than two million Japanese people have enjoyed the flowering of friendly China-Japan relations to date.

» Founder Ikeda wrote about his meeting with the late Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, saying, "Premier Zhou had recalled to me that 50 years earlier following his studies in Japan, he had left there when the cherries were in bloom. I then requested that he 'please come again when the cherries are blossoming.' Later, fulfilling Premier Zhou's wish, his wife visited Japan in the season of cherry blossoms. 'When the cherries are in bloom'—these were Premier Zhou's last words to me." Ambassador Cheng Yonghua of the People's Republic of China once reminisced about his days at Soka University (also established by Founder Ikeda) in Hachioji, Tokyo.

He was among one of the first groups of Chinese students to study in Japan after the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Ambassador Cheng recalled that at Mr. Ikeda's suggestion, they planted a cherry tree on the Soka University campus in memory of Premier Zhou Enlai. This year's tour of the CNPOC was conducted throughout the season of cherry blossoms in Japan, and Ambassador Cheng also enjoyed watching the superb blossoms of Chinese culture onstage together with his diplomatic colleagues in Tokyo this spring.



Cherry blossom tree and commemorative monument for late Premier Zhou Enlai at Soka University

From the Min-On Music Museum Collection

"Bologna" Harpsichord 1860s, Bologna, Italy

The harpsichord is a keyboard instrument that produces its distinctive sound by plucking a string when a key is pressed. The earliest harpsichord designs date from the late Middle Ages—well before the invention of the fortepiano in the early 1700s.

The "Bologna" Harpsichord was produced around 1680. Several paintings in the Venetian style were later added, along with the beautifully built and carved rococo stand. The use of the Japanese lacquer style in the paintings, evident in the brilliant red coloration, makes this perhaps the most ornately decorated harpsichord in 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.

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 800 performances each year, attracting a total audience of more than 1.2 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!

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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



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