

harmony

Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association

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contents

The Main Event

- 2 Benny Goodman Orchestra
Swings into Town

Features

- 2 Interview with Ken Peplowski,
virtuoso clarinetist and band leader
of the Orchestra
- 3 Interview with Abijah, lead singer
with Jamaica Rocks
- 3 Jamaica Rocks Celebrates
A Rich Musical Culture
- 4 The Ballet de Yoko Komatsubara
Features Passion del Flamenco
- 4 Interview with Japan's premier
Flamenco artist Yoko Komatsubara

News Update

- 5 Mariachi Del Sol Tours across
Kyushu for Viva Mexico
- 5 Gyeonggi Provincial Dance
Company Expresses Traditions
of Korea
- 5 Anata Bolivia Celebrates Festivity in
Local Communities across Tokyo

Interview

- 6 Interview with His Excellency
Mykola Kulinich, Ambassador
of Ukraine

Min-On Information

- 8 From the Min-On Music Museum
Collection: Orchestral Corona Style
No. 33 "King of Regina"



Benny Goodman Orchestra Swings Into Town



The Benny Goodman Orchestra at Nakano Sun Plaza

The "King of Swing" Benny Goodman and his orchestra was one of the most popular musical groups in America during the Swing Era that began in the mid-1930s, and helped secure a new place for jazz as "America's classical music" on the American cultural scene.

Ken Peplowski, an alumnus of the Benny Goodman Orchestra, has been directing the legendary big band for occasional tours around the world, and now under the auspices of the Min-On Concert Association, they performed a thirteen-city "Swing Jazz"

concert tour around the Kanto metropolitan area in Japan from September 23 through October 9, 2011.

The concert featured their iconic swing performances of *Sing, Sing, Sing, Let's Dance* and *Don't Be That Way* among many others, and accompanied by a guest singer and pianist Carol Welsman, they played a number of timeless jazz classics. The refined musicianship of each band member combined with a relaxed and warm performance served to swing and delight the audiences in Japan.

"Jazz is like poetry: I don't need to think, but just express myself."

Interview with Ken Peplowski, virtuoso clarinetist and band leader of the Orchestra

Min-On: This is the first time for you to play a Min-On concert tour. Could you share your impressions of this Japan tour?

Ken Peplowski: I've been to Japan on several occasions in the past, but for smaller concerts and club performances. But this is the first time I've toured Japan and played in large auditoriums full of people. I was very happy with the quality of the audiences at every venue. They were not particularly jazz fans, but they were all music lovers, so it was a real pleasure to introduce the world of jazz to these audiences. Also, on my visit to the Min-On Culture Center and Music Museum, I was deeply impressed by the work and dedication of everyone at the Min-On Concert Association, as well as the ideas that underpin the organization.

Min-On: Could you tell us how you began your remarkable career in music?

Peplowski: I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio. My father was an amateur musician, and he gave me his clarinet while my brother got a trumpet. When I was in sixth grade, I played in public for the first time, and together with my brother, joined a local professional polka band. Of course, as a kid, I was happy to make some money, but more than that, I really loved to play music for people, and I realized that I wanted to play for a living. This year marks the 40th anniversary since my professional debut in the polka band.

Min-On: Many people have complimented you on your virtuosity. Have you had a particular mentor to nurture your amazing talent in playing this difficult instrument?

Peplowski: Although I was young when I started playing in the polka band, that professional environment became a great music school for me: that's where I learned to improvise over chord changes and other techniques. It's just like learning to swim by being thrown into the water. When I was in high school, besides the professional band, I played in a school jazz band and jazz gigs around town, as well as teaching at the local music store. I loved the instrument and was proud to play clarinet all the time. After attending college for a year, I joined the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra in 1978, which at that time was directed by Buddy Morrow. Buddy asked me to play not only clarinet but also lead alto, and while in the band, I met the great tenor saxophonist Sonny Stitt. He really inspired my playing of the tenor sax, and tours of the orchestra became a great road-school.

After I settled in New York, Benny Goodman came out of retirement to put together a new big band, and in 1984, Benny personally auditioned and hired me as a tenor saxophonist. He was extremely strict in rehearsals, but he was as demanding of himself as he was on us. I think my friend and I were the only guys not to get fired at least once during the lifetime of that last band. I played tenor, while absorbing Benny's



Ken Peplowski

genius on clarinet. Naturally, I deeply respect him as a clarinet legend, and indeed, Benny Goodman was a great influence for me.

Min-On: Lastly, could you share your thoughts on music?

Peplowski: I love jazz, but actually I love all kinds of music. I would say that music is my life. Jazz is like poetry: I don't need to think, but just express myself. In a sense, that is improvisation. We can communicate with each other and unite through music. I would like to find more opportunities for young people to learn how to develop themselves, and how to bring out their own best qualities through music. And I sincerely hope that organizations like Min-On will contribute to providing young people with these opportunities.

"I don't sing if I don't mean it."

Interview with Abijah, one of the lead singers with Jamaica Rocks

Min-On: When you performed *Get Up, Stand Up* at the Jamaica Rocks premiere at Nakano Sun Plaza, it reminded us of Bob Marley's concert at the same venue. Please share your impression of performing there.

Abijah: It was a wonderful experience to perform on the same stage as Bob Marley. Although I never met him, he is very special to me. In 2009, my album of Bob Marley covers, *Sun is Shining*, was number one in the Reggae chart in the US for 6 weeks, and it was then that some people in Jamaica started to call me "the next Bob Marley."

I believe music is energy, and we absorb different kinds of energy from a performance. I felt the positive energy of Bob Marley on that stage. And although my voice was suffering from the effects of jet lag, exhaustion from the long trip, and the many rehearsals, I tried my best to project his positive energy through the performance. If you were reminded of listening to Bob Marley, that makes me very happy.

Min-On: Could you tell us about this performance of Jamaica Rocks?

Abijah: Jamaica Rocks was formed exclusively for the Min-On concerts. The group plays not only Reggae but performs a variety of Jamaican music, including Mento, Ska, Rocksteady, Dancehall, as well as roots music, like Kumina,



Abijah

whose songs contain significant messages. We aimed to include as much as possible from the musical culture of Jamaica to create a unique performance for Japanese audiences.

Min-On: Could you share your thoughts on music?

Abijah: I believe the message of a song is very important. I don't sing if I don't mean it. Of course, I perform for the people to enjoy my music, but my music is intended to reach people, give people positive energy, inspire and encourage them. Bob Marley was probably not the best singer—indeed, there are better singers in Jamaica—but his energy and his message were so positive. It is more important to come to a concert and feel the

positive energy more than just having fun. So I want people to leave the venue with a feeling of being encouraged, empowered and energized.

Min-On: Lastly, please share any comments on the Min-On Concert Association.

Abijah: The Min-On audiences comprised every generation from young to old. They were different to the typical reggae audience of people just having fun, and I felt that they listened with concentration and thought about the music they were hearing. Also, I appreciated the professionalism and dedication of the Min-On staff and crews throughout this tour. After the devastating earthquake, the people of Japan are still struggling, and around the world there are many problems. Yet music can provide positive energy, inspiration and encouragement to people, something that governments and politicians struggle to do. That's why it's important to bring people together at a concert and unite through the power of music.

It was truly a great experience to work with Min-On to put on a concert as positive as Jamaica Rocks. We are all one people, and I believe that when we understand that there will be peace in our hearts, and then a peaceful world will be in our hands.

Jamaica Rocks Celebrates A Rich Musical Culture

On September 9, the long-awaited world premier of 'Jamaica Rocks' was held at Nakano Sun Plaza Hall in Tokyo—venue of a concert by the legendary Reggae artist Bob Marley in 1979. Jamaica Rocks is the name of a talented group of Jamaican singers, musicians and dancers, organized by the Jamaican government's Ministry of Culture, and dispatched for the purpose of cultural exchange through Min-On's *Caribbean Musical Cruise* concert series, performing at venues in twenty-four cities across Japan.

The concert, which also marks the commencement of the next year's 50th

anniversary celebrations of Jamaica's independence, featured several genres of music and dance, which served as an introduction to Jamaica's unique and rich musical culture. The performance was followed by a commemorative reception attended by Jamaican Minister Olivia Grange, ambassadors from various countries, and many other distinguished guests.

Jamaica Rocks successfully concluded the month-long tour, rocking Japan with their highly energetic and colorful performances, and left Tokyo to return home on October 17, the group a source of great pride for the Jamaican Cultural Ambassador.



The singers of Jamaica Rocks in performance

The Ballet de Yoko Komatsubara Features Passion del Flamenco



Dancers and musicians of the Ballet de Yoko Komatsubara

During September and October, the premier Spanish dance company in Japan, *The Ballet de Yoko Komatsubara*, accompanied by a total of six dancers, singers and guitarists invited from Spain completed a successful sixteen-city tour of the *Passion del Flamenco*.

Known as Asia's *bailaora*, Komatsubara is one of the first-generation of flamenco dancers and a renowned pioneering choreographer in Japan. After she learned the quintessence of Spanish dance from virtuoso dancers in Spain, she formed her own dance company in 1969. Since its founding, the company has performed

throughout Japan and abroad for more than four decades, and has received numerous awards, including the 'Ribbon of the Order of Isabel' given by Spanish King Juan Carlos I in 1977 to recognize her contribution to Spanish dance around the world.

Yoko Komatsubara and her company once again brought the passion and spirit of Spanish flamenco onstage through their singing, dancing, guitar playing as well as hand clapping and foot stamping, which drew enthusiastic applause at every venue across south-central Japan.

"Flamenco is a physical expression of living as a human being."

Interview with Japan's premier Flamenco artist Yoko Komatsubara

Min-On: Last year, UNESCO officially declared flamenco an 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'. Please briefly tell us about flamenco in general.

Yoko Komatsubara: Although the exact origin of flamenco cannot be pinpointed, nor its evolution exactly traced, it is believed that some of its roots stem from the musical cultures of the *Gitano* and *Roma*, nomadic groups who migrated from northern India about 600 years ago, and often referred to as gypsies. Their emotions from the struggles and sorrows of nomadic lives became their songs, and the essence of Indian culture mixed beautifully with the unique musical culture of Andalusia in Spain, and eventually the present form of flamenco evolved. Flamenco embraces the joys and hardships of life, and it is a physical expression of living as a human being. Because flamenco reflects the passion, romance and fervor of people's lives, it inspires people and is recognized as one of the world's cultural treasures.

Min-On: As a person growing up in Japan, how did you break into the world of Spanish flamenco?

Komatsubara: Since I was a child, I learned the *Shamisen* and Japanese traditional dance, as well as classical ballet, and later became a stage actress. Although I had a quite few opportunities to see Spanish dance at nightclubs, I didn't find



Yoko Komatsubara

it very impressive. However, in 1960, I saw a performance by flamenco legend Pilar Lopez at Sankei Hall in Tokyo. The beauty and passion of her performance deeply inspired me and completely captured my heart. The energy of her performance was incredible, and I fell in love with flamenco. I immediately made plans to go to Spain in 1962. That was the beginning of my long career in flamenco. There in Andalusia, I encountered Maestro Enrique el Cojo. As a child, he had a tumor in his left leg, leaving him with a permanent limp, yet he never gave up dancing. Moreover, he manifested in his

performance the courageous spirit of living with this hardship. His performances always inspired me, and brought tears to my eyes. I deeply appreciate learning the essence of flamenco from such a distinguished mentor.

Min-On: Your ballet company has a history of more than 40 years, which is equivalent to the history of flamenco in Japan. At the same time, your company has always had a close association with Min-On. Please share your experience and comments on the activities of Min-On.

Komatsubara: Indeed, the first professional performance of our dance company was sponsored by Min-On, and even before that, Min-On had invited Spanish dance companies to perform flamenco in Japan. In the 42-year history of our company, we have toured throughout Japan and in other countries under the auspices of Min-On, and through those exciting opportunities, numerous dancers and artists from our company have been nurtured and the company itself has grown. At the same time, I have always felt the sincerity and enthusiasm of Min-On audiences, which is something different to the experience with other concert organizations. Once again, I would like to reiterate my appreciation to the Min-On Concert Association for the last four decades.

Mariachi Del Sol Tours across Kyushu for Viva Mexico

Mariachi is a genre of music that originated in Mexico, a country of legendary sunshine, particularly in the Western state of Jalisco. The word *Mariachi* refers to a musician who dresses in a particular *traje* style, which includes ankle boots, a broad-rimmed *sombrero*, short jacket and a large bow-tie, and play a specific style of cheerful and vibrant music using violins, trumpets, a classical guitar, a high-pitched guitar called a *vihuela*, a large bass guitar known as a *guitarrón*, and occasionally a harp. All the band members sing.

Viva Mexico is a popular Min-On concert

series that showcases performances from acclaimed artists and groups from Mexico. This fall, as part of *Viva Mexico*, the ensemble Mariachi Del Sol, led by Mexican guitarist Miguel Angel Hernandez, completed a twenty-three-date tour of southern Japan. The Mariachi band, accompanied by female singer Viviana and dancers Carlos and Marisera, played a fun and dynamic repertoire of songs, including the popular *Besame Mucho* and other Mexican favorites. Their performance of lively folk music earned enthusiastic applause at every venue throughout the Kyushu region.



Mariachi del Sol in concert in Kyushu

Gyeonggi Provincial Dance Company Expresses Traditions of Korea



The Gyeonggi Provincial Dance Company

Korea is Japan's closest neighbor, and at various times throughout history the Korean Peninsula has influenced various aspects of Japanese culture, acting as a kind of cultural bridge between Japan and China. On October

31, a Korea-Japan Friendship and Goodwill Concert titled *The Beauty of Korea—Dancing of the Thousand Years* was held at Niigata TERRSA Hall in Niigata Prefecture. Cosponsored by the Korea Foundation and the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Niigata, the world-renowned Gyeonggi Provincial Dance Company was brought to the stage in Japan at Min-On's invitation to introduce the cultural heritage of Korean music and dance to Japanese audiences.

Since its establishment in 1993, the Company has represented Korean traditional performing arts, and at the same time served as a leader in the arts' development under the direction of Artistic Director Cho Heung-Dong, who has featured unique blends of traditional

and modern Korean dance with a martial arts twist. The ensemble of world-class performers wearing brightly colored traditional dress presented quintessential Korean traditions, including the fan dance incorporating large, colorful fans to represent butterflies in flight and elegant flowers in bloom; the *Samulnori*, a graceful dance to the accompaniment of a rhythm on hourglass-shaped drums and gongs; and other traditional pieces as well as some new choreography. This gorgeous dance performance, expressing the beauty and traditions of Korea, drew an enthusiastic response from the audience. The event, designed as a cultural exchange between the two neighboring countries, was also held at Nagaoka Lyric Hall in Niigata prefecture on November 2.

Anata Bolivia Celebrates Festivity in Local Communities across Tokyo

The Min-On *Fureai* concert series is particularly designed for developing a rapport among neighboring residents by holding concerts of international artists at medium-size theaters in local communities. During October and November, Min-On brought Anata Bolivia, a popular Bolivian folk band from the city of La Paz, onstage for a *Fureai* concert tour of 28 performances in the Tokyo metropolitan area.

In Bolivia, *Anata* means "Festivity" or "Carnival," and Anata Bolivia was formed by a group of professional Bolivian musicians at the initiative of Japanese singer Hiroyuki Akimoto to celebrate the indigenous culture

of Bolivian folk music.

After graduating from university in Japan, Mr. Akimoto moved to Bolivia to study indigenous music culture and become a professional Bolivian folk musician. After ten years of playing and studying in La Paz, he is now acclaimed as an esteemed singer after the Bolivian heart, and his compositions, which have distilled the essence of Bolivian folk, have won not only popularity but also a number of music awards in Bolivia.

In this Min-On *Fureai* concert series, the vibrant performances of Bolivian folk music celebrated *Anata* in local communities throughout Tokyo.



Anata Bolivia in concert

"Ukraine is a nation of singers and music."

Interview with His Excellency Mykola Kulinich, Ambassador of Ukraine



"Traditional Cossack songs are expressions of struggle, love, life, worries and loss; however, their dance is joyful and dynamic, expressing their energetic and active lives in dance."

Min-On: We appreciate this opportunity for an interview with your Excellency. Could you briefly introduce the esteemed culture of Ukraine for us?

Ambassador Kulinich: That's no easy task. We have a very specific and long-established cultural background in Ukraine, so it's not easy to briefly introduce our culture in general. We have been an independent country for only 20 years, yet at the same time we are the most ancient nation in Eastern Europe. Our capital Kiev was founded more than 1,500 years ago, and was the biggest capital in the state of Kievan Rus', which united all Slavs in the East, as well as most Russians and Ukrainians. Kiev is also considered the cradle of Christian civilization in Eastern Europe, so we are the most ancient as well as the most easterly Christian country, with a long history and a culture with deep roots.

Our music culture in particular was heavily influenced by various folk and ethnic cultures from many different areas. One of the most impressive and also most important parts of our earlier culture is from the Scythians, who migrated west from Asia more than 3,000 years ago. They left incredible gold artworks, which are now priceless national treasures. These artworks have been exhibited in various countries, including currently in Japan. They are both exquisite in themselves and remarkable expressions of artistic skill and craftsmanship. They are also the finest examples of how a rich cultural heritage has been handed down through thousands of years, even though we

are a very new independent nation.

Min-On: Min-On has invited the internationally acclaimed Ukrainian National Folk Dance Ensemble twice in the past, and their superb performances drew enthusiastic applause from audiences all over Japan.

Ambassador: I can say with confidence that we have an outstanding musical culture, especially

around the world. We have many fantastic singers, and I am proud that several are prima donnas and leading opera singers with famous operas in Europe and elsewhere.

Our traditional folk songs, on the other hand, are not so joyful, often containing sad lyrics. This is perhaps because Ukraine was a nation of warriors—the history and tradition of the Cossack. Ukraine was a crossroads of politics and different tribes and nations, so Cossacks struggled and fought to protect their homeland. Traditional Cossack songs are expressions of struggle, love, life, worries and loss; however, their dance is joyful and dynamic, expressing their energetic and active lives in dance. We are deeply grateful to Min-On for introducing the culture and musical traditions of Ukraine to the Japanese people.

Min-On: Please share your experience of performing music in your own career as a singer.

Ambassador: Although I am not directly involved in musical

activities anymore, I was a singer at school. At the boys' school I attended, boys with certain voices would be selected for the choir, and I was one of those picked. Boys' choirs were a tradition of the Catholic Church, and the clear voices of prepubescent boys were especially treasured. From the age of 11 through 14, I was a member of the Children's Chorus of Kiev—one of the most acclaimed choirs in Ukraine—and had the chance to sing in Georgia, Estonia, and many other areas. As I grew older, my voice was less successful, but many of my friends are still singing professionally,



Ukrainian Cossack dance performance

when it comes to singing. Ukraine is a nation of singers and music. I believe that Ukrainian opera and Ukrainian singing are among the world's best for two reasons: First, we have a very long tradition of singing; and second is thanks to the Ukrainian language itself, which is very melodic and highly suited to singing. It is said that two European languages are especially suitable for singing: Italian and Ukrainian. Indeed, the sounds that comprise the two languages are quite similar.

Ukrainian singers are represented at La Scala in Italy and in many other theaters

and one has a successful career singing with the Bonn Opera in Germany.

My life as ambassador in Japan is very fulfilling partly because there are so many wonderful opportunities to see and listen to fine musical performances by leading international artists. Tokyo in particular is full of artistic treasures from around the world.

Min-On: Please share any comments and suggestions you have for the Min-On Concert Association.

Ambassador: One thing that distinguishes Min-On from other concert organizations is that it has a spiritual underpinning. Min-On has a clear sense of mission to create wellbeing. It's not just a commercial concert promoter, but something more; its priority is the presentation and exchange of musical culture from around the world. I really appreciate that Min-On has provided opportunities not only for concerts of classical music and ballet, but also for traditional folk and ethnic performances with different cultural roots. These unique cultural exchange activities help develop mutual understanding and respect, and bring



Ukrainian folk dance performance

people closer together. I also recognize that Min-On attracts sophisticated audiences from all generations. I feel that Min-On's activities are not simply one-day projects connecting audiences with the performing arts, but represent a long-term project to

strategically connect the heritage of music culture to future generations and the future of the performing arts. Min-On is a wonderful platform to spiritually unite people in a very natural and spontaneous way.

From the Editor



Carol Welsman plays Herbie Hancock's piano at the Min-On Music Museum

» A Steinway Model D, the world's most acclaimed concert grand, has been featured in the "Melody Hall" of the Min-On Music Museum since 2008 and played every hour for museum visitors to enjoy its superb sound. Built in 1960, this majestic nine-foot-long instrument was owned by the world-renowned jazz pianist Herbie Hancock for more than three decades, and many of his jazz masterpieces were composed on it. In 2008, Mr. Hancock composed a piece dedicated to Min-On founder, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, whom he admires as "virtuoso of life," and played the composition on the piano once more before presenting it as a gift in honor of Dr. Ikeda's 80th birthday.

» Carol Welsman, the internationally acclaimed singer and pianist, played a duet with Herbie Hancock in 2005, an event documented in a film entitled *The Language of Love* released in her home country of Canada. In Japan on tour as a guest artist with the Benny Goodman Orchestra, Ms. Welsman visited the Min-On Culture Center before the tour got underway. While viewing the Music Museum, she was excited to have the opportunity to play the piano that belonged to Herbie Hancock, and immediately emailed him in LA to share the experience. Mr. Hancock replied a few hours later, congratulating her on her birthday (that happened to be that day), and also on her first-time association with Min-On, which Mr. Hancock described as a "genuine organization of good hearts."

» Min-On Founder Daisaku Ikeda wrote in his essay titled *Recollections of My Meetings with Leading World Figures*, "Mr. Hancock laments that whenever he comes to Japan, interviewers focus only on his musical technique. 'What really matters,' he asserts, 'is the inner life of the musician who creates the music. No matter how sophisticated our technique, if we don't develop our lives at the most fundamental level, it will be difficult to create music that touches others' hearts.' In addition to musical talent, great musicians always have firm convictions, Mr. Hancock maintains. The instrument does not perform the music; rather, the music is a manifestation of the performer's life itself."

From the Min-On Music Museum Collection



The "Pisa" harpsichord is still playable in its original condition

Orchestral Corona Style No. 33 "King of Regina" (1897, U.S.A.)

The music box originally derived from the mechanism used to sound carillons, or bell chimes, in church clock towers in Switzerland and other countries, and with the invention of the spring in the 16th century, this technology was applied to clocks. In the 1830s, the cylinder music box was created as a mechanical musical instrument completely independent from clocks, and by 1886, a new music box style appeared in Germany called the disc-playing music box.

The Regina Company of Rahway, New Jersey was one of the most impressive firms in American music box manufacturing, producing various kinds of music boxes. This model is the Orchestral Corona Style No.33, otherwise known as "King of Regina." It is a premium-quality disc music box, manufactured in 1897 using all of Regina's finest engineering techniques. It is capable of automatically playing 12 steel discs in succession.

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 75,000 cultural performances and concerts, with a total audience of more than 110 million. Through these various musical activities Min-On has successfully initiated cultural exchanges with 104 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!

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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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