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Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association

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Min-On



## Guaco Lands in Japan with their Energetic, Tropical Latin-Caribbean Sound and Passion

**T**he musical cultures of the Caribbean are rich and diverse. Each island and nation has a unique cultural identity shaped by a different blend of colonial influences, the varied traditions of immigrant populations and the enduring legacies of native tribes. Over time, a variety of musical genres were synthesized, with many of them also finding popularity outside the Caribbean region. Having previously showcased exquisite performances by groups from the Caribbean islands of Haiti, Jamaica, and Cuba, Min-On initiated a concert series entitled *The Caribbean Musical Cruise* in 2009.

Venezuela is located on the northern coast of South America. The country comprises a continental mainland and numerous islands in the Caribbean Sea. Venezuela is widely known for its biodiversity, present in abundant wildlife preserved in natural habitats, and cultural diversity, including a kaleidoscopic musical culture of varying ethnic influences.

For the 4th installment of *The Caribbean Musical Cruise* series, Min-On invited the Venezuelan super band Guaco to Tokyo

in collaboration with the Embassy of Venezuela. This was their first Japan tour, and they performed in 13 cities from October 28 through November 17, 2016. Ambassador of Venezuela H.E. Seiko Ishikawa remarked, "Guaco is one of the most vibrant bands in Venezuela, and it is a great privilege for them, and for us Venezuelans, to have them on tour all across Japan."

Guaco was originally formed almost half a century ago as a traditional band playing gaita, a style of Venezuelan folk music unique to folkloric Zulian rhythms, with heavy use of drums and percussion. Since the early 70s, Guaco diverged from traditional gaita by amalgamating the genre with salsa music. They continued to evolve through a complex mixture of gaita, salsa, merengue, reggae, calypso and other tropical genres, as well as pop, jazz and even rock-and-roll, creating their own unique genre of "Guaco music."

Guaco has today expanded to a 17-member super band consisting of four vocalists, two trumpets, one each of trombone, tenor sax, bass, keyboard, electric guitar and drums, and five extraordinary percussionists

playing a host of instruments including timbales, tumbadoras and bongos, as well as the traditional tamboras and charrasca.

Their stop at the Bunkyo Civic Auditorium in Tokyo in the middle of their tour drew a capacity audience, including ambassadors and diplomats from 12 countries. Throughout the show, their passionate performance, including the numerous percussion instruments, captivated the audience through vibrant tropical Latin-Caribbean rhythms. Many people spontaneously rose from their seats and danced to the beat.

As a band with a nearly fifty-year history, Guaco serves as a time-honored and important cultural link for the people of Venezuela. That said, this was their first time to visit Japan, a country that has played an important role for many Latin Americans—if only through their imaginations. It was clear that their journey to finally perform for the Japanese people was a treasured experience. "Guaco music" transformed the concert hall into a bright, cheerful Caribbean atmosphere, perfect for celebrating the continuation of Venezuelan-Japanese friendship and goodwill.



# The Bandoneon: Voice and Soul of Tango Music

A tango orchestra typically consists of bandoneons, violins, piano and double bass, in addition to guitar and drums, accompanied by singers and dancers of the tango tradition. Among these instruments, the bandoneon is perhaps the most key instrument in producing the authentic, emotional and nostalgic sound of tango. This unique accordion-like instrument with buttons and bellows was originally developed in Germany during the 1850s for use in small churches that could not afford organs. It was also used as a mobile organ to accompany religious services on the road. It is believed that German immigrants brought the



Horacio Romo's performance with the tango dancers

bandoneon to Argentina around 1870, where the instrument was quickly adopted into the nascent genre of tango in Buenos Aires at the end of the 19th century. The German-made bandoneon originally had 60 notes spread over 30 buttons as its keyboard, but by the beginning of the 20th century, it rapidly changed to adequately suit tango music. As a result, a sophisticated 142-note version with 71 buttons had become standard in Argentina and Uruguay. Because the buttons are rather illogically organized, layed out on both ends of the instrument, each button creating a different pitch by opening and closing the bellows, the bandoneon is extremely difficult to master. However, in the mid-20th century, beginning with Aníbal Troilo—a leading proponent of the bandoneon and one of the greatest masters of it—a number of notable bandoneonists made a sudden appearance on the tango scene. They developed zealous and sophisticated techniques, creating the “Golden Age” of tango with their unique modern tango compositions. Thus, the bandoneon became the ultimate instrument exemplifying the distinctive voice and soul of tango.

Since the Min-On Tango Series was launched in 1970, Min-On has proudly presented a performance of renowned



Argentinian tango artists through a national Japan tour every year. The impressive lineups have included legendary bandoneonists and young virtuosos from the latest generation of bandoneon players. They include Leopoldo Federico in 1976, Carlos Lazzari in 1982, Nestor Marconi in 1991, Julian Plaza in 1996, Carlos Buono in 1999, Carlos Galvan in 2003, Victor Lavallen in 2010, Roberto Alvarez in 2011 and young Facundo Lazzari in 2015. The Min-On Tango Series has showcased masters of the bandoneon across four decades of international tango history.

In 2017 for the 48th installment of the series, Min-On invited young bandoneon master Horacio Romo and his up-and-coming sextet for a nationwide tour, traveling to 25 cities across Japan from January 24 through March 8. Horacio Romo's virtuosic performance of the bandoneon mesmerized thousands of tango lovers across Japan.

## Horacio Romo Dedicates Original Composition to Min-On Founder

Horacio Romo, together with the members of his special ensemble for the Japan tour of *Dramatic Tango 2017*, visited the Min-On Culture Center in Tokyo on January 20 before embarking on the nationwide tour. After being warmly welcomed by staff members of the Min-On Concert Association, during his formal meeting with Min-On President Hiroyasu Kobayashi, Romo expressed his personal admiration and warmest appreciation: “It is my greatest pleasure to visit Japan once again for my own sextet's nationwide tour. I have been aware of Min-On's contributions to tango culture

in Argentina, but when I came to Japan in 2013 as a member of Nicolas Ledesma's orchestra for the 44th installment of the *Min-On Tango Series*, I realized how much

Min-On has contributed to fostering thousands of tango lovers in Japan. As a token of my appreciation, I wrote an original composition entitled *Camino en el Amanecer*

(in English: *A Path to the Dawn*) to express my determination for progressing together with people worldwide on a path of hope, towards a more peaceful world.” At the end of the meeting, maestro Romo, alongside all the tour members, presented the framed score of *Camino en el Amanecer* to Min-On Founder Daisaku Ikeda, which was received on his behalf by the president. His new composition premiered during the Japan tour.



# Min-On's Concert Series Continue to Create

## The Min-On Global Session Forges Harmony Between Ethnicities

This year, the Min-On Concert Association initiated an innovative concert series entitled *The Min-On Global Session* to showcase music and instruments representing a diverse array of ethnic traditions and musical cultures from around the globe. The first installment in

this series was an exercise exploring the lute family of composite chordophones, which are defined as musical instruments with strings bound to a neck, connected to a round body that acts as a resonator. Min-On organized a nine-city concert tour of the first *Global Session* under the theme of *Gen—*

*Strings Connecting the Hearts of People from Different Countries and Ethnicities.*

The tour featured the young Tsugaru shamisen virtuoso Sho Asano and master shakuhachi flutist Koushi Tsukuda from Japan, talented flamenco guitarist Juan Maria Real with cante flamenco vocalist Paz de Manuel from Spain and master sitar player Sawan Joshi with tabla drummer Miles Tanthekar from Nepal. During the first half of the concert, each group of distinguished artists performed and expressed their contrasting traditions of ethnic musicality through their respective folk instruments. In the second half, they presented their collaborative repertory, including contemporary and original compositions in a cross-cultural combination of ethnic stringed instruments, drawing out the colorful tones and layered sounds with each of their boundless artistic skill. The musical innovation of the *Global Session*, which gracefully presented a beautiful world of global harmony through a dynamic ensemble of three different ethnicities, was exceptionally well received by its audiences.



## Swedish Diva Margareta Bengtson's Enchanting Soprano Artistry

Sweden has a prominent choral tradition and is home to many singers. In fact, some statistics show that out of a total population of 9.5 million, an estimated 600,000 belong to some sort of choral group. They feature a wide variety of folk songs from the Scandinavian and Baltic States, and genres of music from all over the world, including jazz, pop, rock and roll and even heavy metal.

Among thousands of divas in Sweden, Margareta Bengtson is a distinguished jazz singer with a serene soprano voice. She grew up in a family of musicians from Stockholm, her mother teaching voice and her father playing jazz, making Margareta a natural-born talent as she too devoted her career to music. She went on to study chorus and the harp at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, becoming a member of The Real Group, an internationally acclaimed Swedish a cappella jazz quintet. She brought her high vocal range and spectacular jazz vocal talent to the group as soprano for over twenty years. After she left The Real Group in 2006, Margareta continued to develop her solo career as a harpist and jazz vocalist in Stockholm.

With support from the embassy of the Kingdom of Sweden, Min-On invited Margareta Bengtson, accompanied by a Swedish jazz quintet lead by jazz trumpeter Peter Asplund, to perform in Japan. With a

repertoire spanning classic jazz masterpieces to Swedish folk songs, she delivered world-class quality jazz music through her incredible soprano vocal artistry, which enchanted and inspired audiences during her four-city tour in Japan this winter.





# Powerful Bonds Between Japan and the World

## Gomalan Brass Quintet from Italy Delivers Musicianship and Humor

**M**usic includes myriad types of ensembles, from classical orchestras, string and wind ensembles, to jazz and rock bands, as well as choirs, consisting solely of vocalists. Among these ensembles, the brass quintet has established popularity since appearing in the later half of the 20th century, beginning with the Chicago Brass Quintet, the American Brass Quintet and the Canadian Brass. Brass quintets perform a wide range of music with only brass instruments, typically including two trumpets, one French horn, one trombone and one tuba.

This winter, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Japan and Italy, Min-On invited the Gomalan Brass Quintet, an outstanding Italian brass quintet, for a 14-city Japan tour from November 28 through December 16, 2016. Each member of the prize-winning brass quintet belongs to the world of classical music in Italy. Yet once gathered as Gomalan Brass, they display a broad repertoire through their virtuoso brass instrument techniques. One of their concerts in Tokyo was held at the majestic Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre Concert Hall. Part one of the program comprised various pieces of favorite light classics. Part two covered a wide range of soundtracks from popular movies, such as *Indiana Jones*, *Star Wars*, the Italian masterpiece *New Cinema Paradise* and the Japanese animated film *Lupin the Third*. Each quintet member took turns as emcee, inserting comical quips in broken Japanese in



between their performance. Throughout the concert, the Gomalan Brass Quintet was greeted with enthusiastic applause and laughter from the Japanese audience acknowledging their incredible blend of virtuoso musicianship and offbeat humor.

## Min-On Presents a Superb Evening with Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

**W**ith the aim of fostering the Japanese classical music scene, Min-On has hosted a great number of classical music performances, dating back to its inaugural concert at the Bunkyo Civic Auditorium in Tokyo on October 18, 1963. Since then, Min-On has hosted over 300 classical music concerts, featuring a great number of conductors, orchestras, soloists and choirs, including a total of 54 eminent conductors and 34 orchestras invited from abroad.

On the evening of November 30, 2016, Min-On presented a classical concert entitled "A Musical Evening with Tchaikovsky's Two Major Concertos," featuring master violin soloist Marlene Ito and young award-winning pianist Daiki Kato alongside the Tokyo City Philharmonic Orchestra. Resident conductor Kazumasa Watanabe led the performance at the Main Hall of Tokyo Bunka Kaikan—a prestigious palace of classical music.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is widely

considered the most popular Russian composer in history. Throughout his career, he composed 169 collective pieces, including several well known among the general public, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *1812 Overture*, and his three ballets: *The Nutcracker*, *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*. Alongside these famous

masterpieces, two of his four concertos, three of his six symphonies, and two of his ten operas are all considered amongst his most famous works.

This concert was focused on the two concertos. Part one of the concert began with a short performance of his famous piece *Polonaise* from the opera *Eugene Onegin*, by the orchestra alone. This was followed by *Op. 23 Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor*—one of Tchaikovsky's popular compositions and one of the most famous piano concertos in history—played by the talented upcoming pianist, Daiki Kato. After an intermission, solo violinist Marlene Ito joined the Tokyo City Philharmonic Orchestra onstage for her virtuoso performance of *The Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 35*—one of the most famous violin concertos, and also one of the most technically challenging. A capacity audience at the palace of classical music all enjoyed the superb musical evening with Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.



# Discussing Colombian Culture and Peace-building Together

Interview with H. E. Gabriel Duque, Ambassador of the Republic of Colombia to Japan

We believe the promotion of friendly relations through cultural exchange is another significant diplomatic mission.



With the support of the embassy of the Republic of Colombia in Japan, the Min-On Music Museum recently presented an admission-free concert and cultural lecture entitled *One—Global Rhythm for Peace: The “ONE PERCUSSION” Project*, by acclaimed Grammy-nominated percussionist Tupac Mantilla. The show was held at the Akasaka Civic Center in front of a capacity audience, including ambassadors and diplomats from 16 countries. On the day after this significant event, H.E. Gabriel Duque, Colombian Ambassador to Japan, gave a courtesy call to the Min-On Culture Center, and we had the opportunity to interview him.

**Min-On:** Thank you so much for the courteous support of your embassy to host the event with Mr. Tupac Mantilla for the *Min-On Cultural Lecture and Concert series*. It is a tribute to everyone involved that his talk and concert were great successes.

**Ambassador Duque:** You're welcome. First, let me express my appreciation to the Min-On Concert Association for your understanding and continuous support towards cultural undertakings for the Embassy of Colombia over so many years. I have always considered the significance of cultural exchange activities to further develop mutual understanding between Colombia and Japan, and deepen the bond of friendship between our two nations. Of course, the embassy has the important mission of promoting bilateral relations, in particular political and economical relations. However, we believe the promotion of friendly relations through cultural exchange is another significant diplomatic mission. Therefore, Colombia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been making an increased effort to introduce various aspects of Colombian culture worldwide—including music, dance and the performing arts. However, we are also introducing scientific and technological achievements, academic endeavors and culinary culture, too.

In that regard, I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the Min-On Concert Association for their support on many occasions in introducing Colombia to the Japanese people. In particular, it was our greatest pleasure that Min-On invited the Ballet Folklórico Nacional de Colombia for a nationwide tour across Japan in 1988. Min-On also supported a special performance by Leonor Gonzalez Mina in 1990, as well as the Barranquilla Folklore Dance Troupe, introduced to Japanese audiences in 1999. Indeed, they are recognized as Cultural Masterpieces of Colombia on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. And this time, under the auspices of Min-On, Tupac Mantilla successfully delivered his cultural lecture and performance entitled *One—Global Rhythm for Peace*. This performance is a cultural undertaking promoted by our government to introduce Colombia's new endeavors in the scientific, technological, artistic and cultural realms. In the future, we look forward to further introducing Colombian traditional culture, alongside the new culture we are proud of, to people worldwide.



Tupac Mantilla's cultural lecture and percussion performance

**Min-On:** Please briefly tell us about Colombian culture in general.

**Ambassador:** To put it simply, the essence of Colombian culture lies in our extremely rich diversity. One reason for this is our country's historical background. Many aspects of Colombian culture can be traced to the earliest indigenous inhabitants of Colombia. Then, there were various European cultural influences during the period of Spanish sovereignty—which lasted for about 500 years from the 16th century onwards—as well as African cultural influence starting in the 17th century. These multicultural influences were key in developing the unique richness of Colombia.



The Ballet Folklórico Nacional de Colombia in 1988

Colombia's diverse culture can also be attributed to its geographical features. Colombia has coastal lowland and islands in the northern region, along the Caribbean Sea, as well as on its western coast along the Pacific Ocean. The western coast, adjacent to the border with Ecuador, is covered by mangrove forest. Furthermore, there are three Andes mountain ranges running through the western inland region, from north to the south, and the vast Amazon rainforest fills the southeast region of Colombia. These geographical features and different climatic zones were influential factors in the development of rich cultural diversity. Our music and dance culture developed as a mixture of African, native indigenous and European influences, alongside musical and rhythmic styles which varied greatly between different regions. Of course, modern art, popular music and contemporary dance should not be forgotten as key part of the rich diversity of Colombia. Our embassy will continue to promote cultural undertakings—in continuous cooperation with the Min-On Concert Association, we hope—and conduct cultural exchange to strengthen the bond of friendship between our two countries.

**Min-On:** Lastly, we would like to extend our warmest congratulations to President Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia on his receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2016.

**Ambassador:** Thank you very much. We too greatly admired his resolute efforts to bring Colombia's over 50-year long civil war to



The Barranquilla Folklore Dance Troupe in 1999

an end. However, by extending his deepest sympathy and sorrow to thousands of people who paid the cost of their lives, and by showing appreciation to international communities who contributed to the peace-building process, President Santos accepted the award as a tribute to the Colombian people. The people alive today are representatives of the countless victims of the civil war. Despite the great hardships and horrors of the past, we have not given up hope for justice and peace. The most important asset to our nation is each and every highly esteemed citizen of Colombia. Our greatest hope in the years to come is that the Colombian people will be able to eliminate violence, poverty and social injustice in our country. I hope everyone worldwide will be inspired by the peace-building efforts of the Colombian people.

## From the Editor

- » Julián Plaza is one of the most legendary bandoneon players and composers in the history of tango. Plaza had his first bandoneon lesson in Buenos Aires at the age of eleven, in 1939. He continued to train his virtuosic techniques in famous tango orchestras, and in 1959 he became a bandoneonist in the legendary Osvaldo Pugliese's orchestra, for whom he wrote a number of arrangements. In 1968, he founded the Sexteto Tango with the famous bandoneon players Osvaldo Ruggiero and Víctor Lavallén. Although in 1992 he separated from the Sexteto Tango, soon Plaza again founded a bandoneon quartet with Alfredo Marcucci, Ernesto Franco and Atilio Corral. Finally in 1996, Julián Plaza's orchestra was invited to Japan for the 27th installment of the annual Min-On Tango Series. His virtuoso performance told a long, vibrant story of the bandoneon and the cultural history of tango.
- » During the Japan tour of the Orquesta Julián Plaza in 1996, upon having the chance to meet Min-On Founder Daisaku Ikeda, Maestro Plaza said he had heard about the Founder and the Min-On Concert Association from Mr. Osvaldo Pugliese many times. Plaza is one generation younger than Pugliese, but he also said he shares an artistic ideal with the legendary tango master, stating that without culture or music life would be bland, and that the advancement of art makes progress towards peace possible worldwide. Based on many years of experience, Maestro Plaza believes that music is the secret to friendship. Similarly, the Min-On Founder once wrote "Art is a powerful 'weapon' in the struggle for peace. It is one of the highest expressions of human victory. The efforts that artists make in perfecting and performing their art are in themselves efforts to create peace and culture for all humanity."



## From the Min-On Music Museum Collection

### Pleyel Grand Piano (1845, France)



*"There are certain times when I feel more inspired, filled with a strong power that forces me to listen to my inner voice, and when I feel more need than ever for a Pleyel piano," wrote the virtuoso pianist and composer Frédéric Chopin to his friend, Camille Pleyel, owner of the Pleyel et Cie piano company. The last piano that Chopin owned was the Pleyel et Cie no. 14,810, from 1848.*

*This piano displayed in the Min-On Music Museum is the same type that Chopin last owned, and highly valuable, allowing one to hear the actual sound Chopin loved. It is known that he had a particular fondness for Pleyel pianos, whose delicate sound and light touch suited the refinement of his almost feminine style. Chopin was 35 years old when this piano was manufactured in 1845, a time when he composed some of his masterpieces, including The Piano Sonata and No. 3 in B minor, op.58.*

## 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



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