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Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association

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Min-On

## Japanese Audiences Enjoy Ireland's Cultural Celebration

**A**s virtuoso Irish fiddler Oisín Mac Diarmada remarked, “Music, dance and language are probably the three strongest elements of cultural inheritance reflecting ‘Irishness.’” He continued, “Irish traditional music is the music of the people and a cultural celebration of Irish communities. Songs represent the everyday experiences and social interactions of people. A lot of music originated from social dancing, so that music is very joyful and exciting. But we also have sadder music—such as songs to lament loss or to remember some sorrowful historical event.”

As a part of the special concert series celebrating the 50th anniversary of its founding, the Min-On Concert Association, with the full support of the Embassy of Ireland in Japan, invited one of Ireland's leading traditional bands, Téada, for a 19-city nationwide tour during March and April. The band was accompanied by Irish singing

legend Séamus Begley and his daughter Méabh, as well as four talented Irish dancers.

Téada, led by fiddler Oisín Mac Diarmada, features unique Irish instruments such as the button accordion, played by Paul Finn; the uilleann pipes (Irish bagpipe) and flute, played by Sean Gavin; the Irish bouzouki (a pear-shaped stringed instrument) and guitar, played by Seán McElwain; and the bodhrán (Irish drum), played by Tristan Rosenstock.

The band performed a variety of traditional Irish tunes gathered from the four corners of Ireland to packed audiences at each

venue. Séamus and Méabh Begley sang old indigenous songs in the Irish language, and the skillful dancers displayed great artistry onstage with their cheerful traditional Irish dance steps. Some of the best-loved Irish songs in their repertoire, such as “Danny Boy” and “The Last Rose of Summer,” are familiar to Japanese audiences—especially older members, who learned these songs at elementary school. Much of the audience was spontaneously humming along with the nostalgic melodies, and Japan truly enjoyed these spring evenings during Ireland's cultural celebration.



## Peking Opera Comes to Life at the Min-On Culture Center

Through July 6, 2014, the Min-On Music Museum in Tokyo's Min-On Culture Center is hosting a special exhibition entitled *The Century's Greatest Master Artist of Chinese Opera—Mei Lanfang and His Contributions to Sino-Japanese Friendship*. The exhibit commemorates the 120th anniversary of Mei's birth in 1894 and the 95th anniversary

of his first visit to Japan for the introduction of Peking opera to Japanese audiences in 1919.

Making his stage debut in 1904 when he was just 10 years old, Mei Lanfang was one of the most famous Peking opera artists in modern history. During his long stage career spanning more than 50 years—a tumultuous era from the late Qing dynasty through the revolutionary periods of the Republic of China to the formation of the People's Republic of China—he maintained his strong presence in the Chinese theatrical world while always working on new acting techniques and concepts. Mei was also the first Chinese artist to spread Peking opera to foreign countries, actively participating in cultural exchanges with Japan, the United States and other regions. His skillful portrayal of female roles in particular won him international acclaim. He became the first president of the China National Peking Opera Company, which was founded in January 1955 under the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China.

This special exhibition showcases over a half-century of Mei's outstanding career as a master artist, with panel displays and a variety of original costumes and artifacts. Through the exhibits, visitors can enjoy learning about Mei Lanfang's life and Peking opera in advance of the China National Peking Opera Company's Japan tour from May through July this year.



## Wayne Shorter Receives Min-On International Award for Arts

In the midst of the cherry blossom season, American virtuoso jazz saxophonist and composer Wayne Shorter visited the Min-On Culture Center on April 15 in between his two days of performances in Tokyo to accept the Min-On International Award for Arts. The award was established as Min-On's highest honor, bestowed upon artists of outstanding achievement and longstanding dedication to the promotion of culture for peace. At the beginning of the ceremony, Min-On President Hiroyasu Kobayashi introduced the award, then on behalf of Min-On Founder Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, standing Executive Advisor Shigeo Hasegawa presented the award together with a gold medal and certificate. The certificate reads, "In recognition of your artistic achievements, which reflect your nobility of character and profound spirituality, and of the unparalleled ability of your music to move people throughout the world and awaken them to the joy of living and the desire for peace, the Min-On Concert Association is proud to bestow upon you as a lasting tribute the Min-On International Award for Arts."

After expressing deep gratitude in his acceptance speech, Mr. Shorter said, "One thought that has stayed with me after engaging in dialogue with Dr. Ikeda and my dear friend Herbie Hancock is what Dr. Ikeda



(From left) President Kobayashi, Executive Advisor Hasegawa, Mr. Wayne Shorter and his wife Carolina

pointed out to me about the ego in all human beings and in entertainers specifically. I had observed there is a tendency to separate oneself from the humanistic aspects of daily life. That is an egoistic function that never sleeps. As an artist practicing the Buddhist philosophy, I came to realize that the creative process dictated by one's egoistic motives could merely result in superficial, cosmetic representations of life in the worlds of

literature, dance, painting, film, music, and arts." Mr. Shorter concluded his speech saying, "However, when the ego functions in collaboration with the humanistic philosophy and altruistic practice of Buddhism, the potential to create value on a universal level transcends temporary, illusionary, and stationary conditions so that we can pursue life's ultimate adventure: to create eternal happiness."

## The Long Way Around Is the Shortest Way Home

*Grammy Award-winning jazz legends Wayne Shorter and Herbie Hancock are both known as longtime practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism and members of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI). In a serialized dialogue with Min-On Founder and SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, they explored the roots of jazz, its role in the advancement of culture and its resonance with Buddhist principles. The following are excerpts from their dialogue series "Soul Freedom: Jazz, Life and Buddhism," in which they discuss the significance of cultural exchange.*

**Ikeda:** One writer has called jazz a musical form unbounded by borders and unconstrained by the times, a genre so encompassing and profound that it transcends nationalities and generations, unifying hearts and minds and inspiring people. It is clear that the two of you embody these characteristics of jazz.

**Shorter:** Thank you. I try hard to create music that puts people in touch with their deepest hopes—dreams they have given up on. I aim to inspire courage in people that will enable them to overcome their fear of the unknown and show them a way to deal with the unpredictable and unexpected.

This is a process of cultural awakening that must be pursued patiently, one step at a time. A saying that I have taken to heart is, "The long way around is the shortest way home." We must instill in each person the awareness that they are endowed with their own cultural and artistic gifts. This is what I believe will eventually move the hearts of people and help them take action.

Experiences with intercultural exchange likewise raise cultural awareness. By coming into contact with other countries, people learn that there are many different perspectives and ways of life. This leads to an intercultural awareness that overcomes the long-held rigid and parochial views of culture that have no place in the world today.

**Ikeda:** Yours is a very insightful view of those who have devoted themselves to promoting cultural exchange. Cultural exchange must be pursued with steady determination. By maintaining a broad, multidimensional and persistent approach, the mighty river of peace and creativity will surely begin to flow. I have come to recognize this truth through the activities of our Min-On Concert Association.



## Tohoku Hope Concert Held in Tokyo

March 11, 2014 marked the third anniversary of the great earthquake and subsequent tsunami which devastated the northeastern coastal areas of the Tohoku region. While still enduring severe conditions, thousands of people in the affected region have worked together to overcome numerous difficulties with a sense of solidarity and have made great efforts toward reconstruction.

With the aim of providing spiritual support to the younger generation in the region through

the healing power of music, the Min-On Concert Association initiated in May 2012 a series of admission-free concerts entitled *The Tohoku Hope Concert—Musical Bonds of the Heart*. The series was cosponsored by TBS Radio & Communications, Iwate Broadcasting Company, the Tohoku Broadcasting Company, and Radio Fukushima Co. To date, concerts have been held for students of 34 primary and secondary schools at 26 venues in the three worst-affected prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima.

To commemorate the third anniversary on March 11, Min-On produced a special edition of *The Tohoku Hope Concert* in Tokyo in collaboration with TBS Radio & Communications. The aim of this special concert has always been to remember the disaster and foster greater awareness of disaster prevention measures. The performance, which took place at Akasaka Blitz, featured local musicians and artists. The participants all have direct experience in the affected prefectures and have been involved in this concert series for the past two years.

The entire event, emceed by presenters from local broadcasting companies, began with visual reports of the 26 Hope concerts held over the past two years. The reports were followed by a live musical performance in front of a special backdrop painted by Hiroshige Kagawa. The gigantic watercolor painting, entitled “Gold of South Sanriku,” depicted scenery of the disaster-stricken area. Besides the professional artists, an award-winning children’s choir from Kitagawa Elementary School of Setagaya Ward, Tokyo were invited as representatives of future generations. Together, they delivered sounds of hope and courage to build a bright future. The production was broadcast over the nationwide radio network on March 22.

## New Wave of Traditional Korean Music Introduced to Japanese Audiences

Min Young-Chi is one of Korea’s most vibrant young traditional musicians. As a master percussionist playing the *janggu* (Korean hourglass drum) and a skillful player of the *daegum* (Korean bamboo flute), he has performed in Korea and Japan as well as at venues worldwide. While mastering the notoriously difficult techniques of traditional Korean music, he has striven to transcend the borders of different genres and create new interpretations.

Accordingly, Min-On organized a series of cultural exchange concerts, entitled *New Korean Music: A Creative Challenge of Traditional Korean Music*—a collaboration between Korean traditional musicians and a Japan-based jazz trio, Trisonique, produced by Min Young-Chi. The aim of these concerts, which were held in Tokyo and Shizuoka Prefecture in April, was to further mutual understanding and friendship between Japan and Korea. The performances were made possible by the generous support of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Culture Center in Japan and were cosponsored by Shizuoka Asahi Television.

The opening performance was an up-tempo rhythmic *janggu* improvisation by Min Young-Chi. This was followed by an elegant performance of traditional Korean instruments such as the *gayageum* (12-string zither) and the *haegeum* (two-string vertical fiddle). Next, audiences were treated to a passionate performance of *pansori*—a traditional form of musical storytelling by a single vocalist and a



drummer. After a contemporary jazz performance by Trisonique, led by pianist Hakuei Kim, all of the musicians performed a collaborative work onstage. These creative performances of “new Korean music” drew enthusiastic applause from the Japanese audiences.

# Life Without Music Is Like Life Without Air

Interview with Ben E. King, legendary American soul singer and songwriter



Soul music virtuoso Ben E. King is perhaps best known as the singer and co-composer of “Stand by Me,” which was a number-one hit in 1961 in the US and again in 1987 in the UK as the theme song to the popular movie *Stand by Me*. At age 75, he has remained active in recording many hit songs and touring as well as in his charitable foundation, The Ben E. King Stand By Me Foundation. We interviewed him in Tokyo during his recent Min-On-organized tour of Japan.

**Min-On:** Following the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami disaster of 2011, many Japanese people were encouraged by your “Sukiyaki” project, in which you covered the popular Japanese song, “Ue o Muite Arukou” (“I’ll Walk With My Head Up”), also called “Sukiyaki.” What was your inspiration behind the project?

**Ben E. King:** I was approached by my Japanese friends and agreed to join the project. After the earthquake, I thought I should be there [in Japan] somehow, and I was eager to do something to support the Japanese people. I like the “Sukiyaki” song, and the feeling in the lyrics and its arrangement really resonate with me. Although it was quite a challenge for me to sing the song in Japanese, I really enjoyed doing so, and now it has become one of my favorite songs. We actually took a trip to the affected area, and that was very, very hard. But I met with lots of very nice people there, and they invited me into their world and showed me around. There were only damaged structures left there, yet the people still had

smiles on their faces. I was very glad to be with them at a time like that. And it was very meaningful to sing that song together with them at such a time.

**Min-On:** Can you say more about music’s power to reach out and touch people?

**King:** Well, going without music is like going without air. You can’t live without either one. I really feel that music is a gift meant for all people, so we should share that precious gift with everybody, especially during times of tragedy. In such times, music is more valuable, because it can lift up hearts and bring joy. I believe that bringing smiles is our job as musicians.

**Min-On:** You have had an incredible career; please tell us when you first started singing.

**King:** I started singing in a church choir in North Carolina. I was in elementary school and the youngest member. My mother and aunts were all in the same choir, and it was a great experience for me to sing with them.

Those religious songs made me feel very close to my mother, so I always had a wonderful time singing those songs together with her. Even now, when I go to see her—although she is 95 years old—she still sings, and I sing along with her.

**Min-On:** When you became a professional singer in New York in the late 1950s, racial segregation was still present. Were you able to experience the power of music in such difficult social circumstances?

**King:** Yes, it was totally different in the old days. One experience I still remember is that after I moved to New York and made my debut, I used to occasionally return to the South for a concert tour. There we had to sing one side to blacks and the other side to whites. Of course, it was very strange, but I could understand that was what the South was about. Because I was born and raised in North Carolina and experienced that all the time, it was easy for me to accept that reality. But as luck would have it, because of the power of music, I think, eventually blacks and whites decided to get together, even in the South. I was impressed to see that happen in my lifetime back then.

**Min-On:** You have continued singing your masterpiece, “Stand by Me,” for more than half a century. Do you have any special attachment to the song?

**King:** The song has been covered by many great artists, and I feel honored to have been one of its writers. Indeed, I am impressed by the fact that all those singers really love to sing the song—John Lennon and Bono among many others. I believe that their versions have helped keep the song alive for such a long time.

**Min-On:** You have established the Stand By Me Foundation to contribute to various outreach programs for young people.

**King:** Actually, I don’t read music and I don’t play any instruments, but I admire those who can. I think the true love of music is the true love of learning an instrument. New technologies make it easy for kids to play music. Of course, learning music is not that easy. It takes devotion, love, and a strong will to stick with an instrument. And that is why I established the foundation—to provide a nurturing environment. That’s why I really appreciate an association like Min-On making such great contributions to various outreach programs.

# Culture Helps Build Bridges Between Countries

Interview with H.E. John Neary, Ambassador of Ireland



“For me, music is extremely important because music has the ability to touch our emotions, and I think it stirs our feelings in a way that no other art form can.”

**Min-On:** We are deeply grateful to Your Excellency and the embassy staff for your generous support of Min-On’s activities, and especially for your cooperation in realizing the first-ever month-long tour introducing traditional Irish music to an audience of thousands across Japan.

**Ambassador Neary:** I am very happy that this Japan tour by Téada with Séamus and Méabh Begley was such an outstanding success. I would like to express my deep appreciation to Min-On for organizing the tour, and also for taking such good care of the performers during their stay in Japan. I attended the first of their concerts in Tokyo, and it was a wonderful evening with terrific performances. While listening to them play and watching the audience’s reactions, I sensed there is not only intense appreciation for Irish music here in Japan but also a real connection between the cultures of the two countries. For me, this is very important because culture is one of the strongest bonds between Ireland and Japan. And culture is something that’s available to everybody, something that everybody can access. Even if people cannot visit another country, they can still experience the culture, so in that way, they get to know more about the country.

Since I came to Japan, I’ve been struck by the popularity of Irish music here, and I believe this illustrates a very strong affinity between Irish and Japanese people. There is no doubt that culture helps build bridges between our two countries and forge close relations between our peoples. It brings people together in a direct way, and that helps promote awareness and understanding.

**Min-On:** Some Irish songs are familiar to Japanese people from their school days; some people even feel nostalgia for Irish melodies. Indeed, during the concert, many audience members were humming along to songs like “Danny Boy” and “The Last Rose of Summer.”

**Ambassador:** For us too, these are nostalgic songs. They enable us to keep in touch with the past and with our national roots. Culture is, for us, a very deep and important part of our national heritage. Not only music and dance but also literature and art—these are all inherent parts of our national identity. We express our culture not only in English but also in our own native Irish language. I am very pleased that Téada—the word means “strings” in Irish—include Irish-language songs in their performance.

**Min-On:** Some European countries exerted a strong cultural influence on other countries around the world during the colonial period, but this seems not to be the case with Ireland.

However, Irish culture has a global reach, and festivals of Irish origin are celebrated all over the world.

**Ambassador:** We never had Irish colonies or anything of that sort, but there is a long tradition of emigration from Ireland. Over the centuries, Irish people have migrated to many countries all over the world: mainly to the United States and Great Britain, but also to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and many other countries including Japan. One characteristic of Irish people is that wherever they go, they always like to seek out other Irish people and keep in touch with them. And Saint Patrick’s Day is another way for them to connect to their home country. Now, it’s not only for Irish people, but Saint Patrick’s Day is a day for everybody who thinks about celebrating their own group with people in their country. So culture, for us, is not just a form of entertainment; it is very much a way of communicating our feelings and reaching out to other people. I believe culture is truly a way of helping to bring different people closer together.



Maighréad & Tríona Ni Dhomhnaill in 2001 during the first installment of Min-On’s *A Journey to the Musical Isles* series

**Min-On:** Traditional pub culture seems unique to Ireland. And much of Irish music and dance developed as a part of that culture. Indeed, Séamus Begley said he grew up in that environment.

**Ambassador:** The pub has been always an important part of our communities, and again, it’s not just a place for people to go for something to drink. It’s a place for going to socialize with and talk to other people, and to enjoy songs and dance as well. Many Irish pubs have a strong tradition: As an evening goes

by, somebody who has a musical instrument will take it out and start playing, and someone who knows that music will start singing along, and soon someone will get up and dance. This is very common and an important part of our culture. And I suppose, because that is such a good way of connecting with other people, it became something that other countries also found interesting and attractive. That's why you find Irish pubs now all over the world.

**Min-On:** Do you sometimes sing or dance in pubs? Please share with us your thoughts about the power of music.

**Ambassador:** I sing a little, but I am not a very good dancer. But for me, music is extremely important because it has the ability to touch our emotions, and I think it stirs our feelings in a way that no other art form can. And that's why I think Irish music is so popular in Japan, because it reaches out to the emotions and feelings of people, and gives them a sense of solidarity.

Indeed, after the terrible disaster in the Tohoku region, we wanted to show our solidarity and support to the people there. So in December 2011, we arranged for some musical performers who are admired here in Japan to tour Tohoku and play at special concerts for the people there. The reactions to their music were really wonderful, and again, the strong bonds between the performers and



Téada perform onstage during this year's Japan tour

people were there, and we felt this was a really strong way of conveying our feelings to the people in Tohoku.

**Min-On:** Could you share your embassy's future plans for cultural exchange events?

**Ambassador:** A main focal point of Irish culture—not only here in Japan but also around the world—is our national holiday, Saint Patrick's Day. In many countries, Saint Patrick's Day is celebrated through parades, concerts, and cultural events of many sorts. Here in Japan this year, there were parades and festivals in 10 cities. And in Tokyo, we had this year's annual Saint Patrick's Day parade on Omotesando. We also had the first-ever "I Love Ireland" festival

in Yoyogi Park immediately after the parade, and that was an extraordinary success. We were delighted that so many people—maybe 20,000—came to the festival, which featured Irish music, dancing, sports, and many other Irish activities. I think it helped people get a better sense of Ireland. And we were delighted that Téada was a central act; they made the musical side of the festival a wonderful success this year. We are extremely grateful to Min-On for helping us bring our Irish culture to a wider audience in Japan, and I hope this will encourage Min-On to invite other Irish performers in the future. Our embassy will certainly continue to support Min-On in these activities as much as we possibly can.

## From the Editor

- » During the nationwide tour of traditional Irish band Téada, we had the chance to interview the bandleader Mr. Oisín Mac Diarmada. When we asked about his impressions of working with Min-On, he gave us a heartfelt compliment: "This is my first experience of an organization like Min-On, which passionately promotes international cultural exchange. At a local level, there are some similar organizations in some US cities, but nothing on such a grand scale. When I first heard about Min-On, I had nothing to compare it to, so it was a real revelation. I really admire how Min-On introduces a variety of culture from around the world to Japanese audiences. All over the world, lots of people are mobilizing for political, religious or other goals, but to see an organization focusing with such passion on cultural exchange is absolutely incredible. What a model!" At Min-On, we are all deeply appreciative of his generous encouragement.
- » On the auspicious occasion of presenting the Min-On International Award for Arts to Mr. Wayne Shorter, we were surprised to learn that at the age of 80 he still travels tours the world playing concerts. Moreover, we were deeply inspired by the compassionate spirit behind his humble demeanor. Losing his young daughter to cerebral palsy and his wife to a plane crash, Mr. Shorter has endured more than his share of hardships over the years. But his undaunted spirit has kept him going, and the Min-On Founder has never ceased to lend Mr. Shorter his unwavering support. We may sometimes experience deep pain and loneliness, but it is from this suffering that we realize the true value of life, the Founder told him. Mr. Shorter says that he wants to create music not just for a particular place or purpose; he wants to create music that lasts for an eternity—music that inspires people to never give up, no matter how dark life becomes. The weight of his words is immeasurable.

### From the Min-On Music Museum Collection



**“Collard & Collard” Square Piano  
1848, London, England**

*These square pianos have horizontal strings arranged diagonally across a rectangular case above the hammers, with the keyboard set in the long side. They first appeared in London in*

*the 1760s and were an immediate success. It was a time of innovation in the piano industry, and manufacturers, pianists and composers were all experimenting with various new ideas in their pursuit of the ideal piano. After 1820, square pianos were constantly redesigned for a more powerful tone by increasing string gauges with metal framing until the tension was almost four times greater than on 18th-century pianos.*

*This “Collard & Collard” Square Piano was manufactured in 1848 by Collard & Collard, a long-established London firm that was closely associated with the composer and virtuoso pianist Muzio Clementi. The company produced many superb instruments in the 19th century, which were signed and stamped variously as “Clementi & Co” in 1800, “Clementi, Collard & Collard” in 1819, and after Clementi’s death in 1832, “Collard & Collard.”*

### 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

