

harmony

Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association

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Ghana Dance Ensemble Takes Audience on a Voyage of Discovery



Ahengoro—a ceremonial dance of the ethnic Akans

A Musical Voyage Across Africa is a concert series initiated by the Min-On Concert Association in 1999 and based on the idea that the 21st century shall be the 'Century of Africa'. Aiming to develop friendships with various African countries and contributing to the realization of the African Century, Min-On has to date introduced and celebrated a variety of rich musical cultures unique to the countries of Africa, each of which has its own distinctive ethnic and tribal heritage of songs and dances.

This year, commemorating the 55th anniversary of the Republic of Ghana's independence, Min-On invited the internationally acclaimed Ghana Dance Ensemble to present the seventh installment of *A Musical Voyage across Africa* series. On August 20, the 19-city Japan tour—the Ensemble's first—kicked off in the northern city of Sapporo, Hokkaido. After traversing the country from north to south, the tour

Expressing Life and Traditions in Dance

Interview with Mr. David Amoo, Artistic Director of the Ghana Dance Ensemble

Min-On: To begin, please tell us about your background and how your musical career developed.

David Amoo: I was born near the Ghanaian capital of Accra in a village called Avenor, which is famous for traditional music and dance. In fact, I was born into a great family of musicians and artists skilled in drumming, dancing and singing, so I have always been surrounded by music and dance, and this inspired the development of my own musical career. Eventually, at the age of 30, I joined the school of performing arts at the University of Ghana. When the National Theatre was established in 1992, I began working there as a stage director. I took up my current position as artistic director five years ago, in 2007.

Min-On: The Ensemble's performance was superb in terms of its artistic quality and technique, but it was also a very energetic expression of joy and the spirit of life in Africa.

Amoo: Our performance is not like an elegant ballet or modern dance; rather, it is the dance of the people, representing the lives and

traditions of different tribes and communities in Ghana. During the period of European colonization of Ghana, the colonial government prohibited Ghanaian traditions of dance and music, and instead we were encouraged to sing hymns. So for a long time, we could not hold any traditional ceremonies to enjoy our own music and dance. But after Ghana won its independence, our first president worked to bring our traditional cultures together,



David Amoo

bringing different people together to form a unified nation of Ghana. The roots of our dance company go back to this time. Since then, our company has had a tradition of gathering talented young artists who show mastery of particular dance forms from different regions of Ghana, and training them to express a variety of dance traditions from Ghana and other parts of Africa.

Min-On: You are a choreographer as well as a master drum maker. Do you know how many types of dance and drums actually exist in Ghana?

Amoo: I've never counted how many, but there are a lot—and even more in Africa as a whole. The type of drum played is determined by where a particular dance form comes from. Ghana has ten major regions across the country, and each region has its own unique tradition of dance and accompanying drums. The region where I come from alone has more than 50 distinct dance forms, so we selected only a few important and special dances from

concluded with splendid success at the city of Nasu-Shiobara in Tochigi prefecture on September 15.

On the evening of September 13, toward the end of their musical voyage in Japan, the Ensemble took to the stage of Nakano Sun Plaza Hall for their Tokyo premiere, an event that was enjoyed by a capacity audience that included Ghanaian ambassador Dr. William G. M. Brandful, as well as many other ambassadors and diplomats from 21 countries. The Ensemble's performance featured a wide range of music and dance from the Republic of Ghana, and included a medley of songs and dances unique to various ethnic groups and regions. For example, Ahengoro, which means "music of loyalty," was performed at the beginning of the show. It is an expression of loyalty to local dignitaries or chiefs at ceremonial events among the ethnic Akans in the Southern Region of Ghana. Atsea is a dance that brings youth together at social

different regions for this tour. Drumming is a key element in Ghanaian dance, especially in the forested regions located in the Central Belt of Ghana. There you can find many species of tree, including mahogany, oak and *tweneboa*, all of which produce different kinds of drums. *Tweneboa* actually means 'drum tree'—the center of the trunk is soft enough to hollow out, while the outside is very hard—perfect for making large drums.

Min-On: Another unique characteristic of your performance was that the performers were dancing even while singing and playing drums. It seems to be a natural part of daily life for the Ghanaian people.

Amoo: As Africans, it is very natural for us to sing and dance whenever and wherever we go. That is obvious when you see how we watch a soccer game—enthusiastically cheering while playing drums and singing and dancing. We are not a quiet people! Singing and dancing is a natural part of our lives right from birth. A mother carries her baby on her back and sings and dances all the time—even at a funeral—so the baby naturally senses the rhythm from her body and this is imbued deeply into the child's own life. In particular, song is a very important means of

events for celebrations throughout Ghana, while Jira is a dance characteristic of Islamic hunters from the Ghana's Northern Region. A total of more than a dozen styles of ethnic songs and dances were performed as a medley in two parts, and during the finale, the entire Ensemble performed a medley from their repertoire of original modern African dances known as Soleokor, with acrobatic

movements redolent of the spirit of Africa drawing enthusiastic and extended applause.

At a commemorative reception held immediately after the performance, the ambassadors and distinguished guests from various countries, together with the members of the Ghana Dance Ensemble, celebrated the magnificent cultural flowers that bloomed onstage for the African Century.



Jira—a traditional dance of hunters from the Northern Region

communication in Ghana, so everybody sings. People celebrate the positive by singing, but they also protest against the negative by singing. So our challenge was to transform those songs and dances from day-to-day life into a style for presentation on stage.

Min-On: As the artistic director, what are the challenges in pursuing your company's goals?

Amoo: Since its establishment, the company has been financially supported by the government. But while we have sufficient funds to maintain our activities within Ghana, we cannot afford to travel abroad and tour independently. We therefore deeply appreciate the Min-On Concert Association sponsoring us and making this Japan tour possible. Our first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, established the company to promote cultural activities with a view to

making Ghana one nation and Africa one union. Thus, I deeply respect and admire Dr. Ikeda's vision of establishing the Min-On Concert Association with the same purpose in mind, of promoting cultural exchange on a global scale. He has such a brilliant mind and so much wisdom, and he has entered into dialogues with many different people around the world, as well as writing many books to share his vision and wisdom for world peace. Indeed, Min-On is the dream of all artists, and I believe it is the only organization today to fulfill the dreams and promises of performing artists around the world. I knew only a little about the role of cultural activities before, but I learned a great deal from Min-On through this Japan tour, and now I am determined to take this knowledge back home to share with more people for the sake of the future of Africa.

Tokyo International Music Competition Opens a Gateway to Success as a Conductor



Tokyo International Music Competition for Conducting finalists (left to right): Yuko Tanaka, Maja Metelska, Mayana Ishizaki

The Min-On Concert Association, in cooperation with the Association of Japanese Symphony Orchestras, held the 16th Tokyo International Music Competition for Conducting at the Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall for an entire week from October 29 through November 4. The event was cosponsored by Asahi Breweries, Ltd., and supported by the Foreign Ministry of Japan, the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan, Tokyo Metropolitan Government, and Japan Broadcasting Corporation.

The Tokyo International Music Competition for Conducting—one category of the Tokyo International Music Competition, which included competitions for vocalists, conductors, chamber ensembles, as well as contemporary composers and choreographers—was launched in 1967 as the Min-On Competition for Conducting, and has since been held every three years with the aim of discovering and encouraging talented conductors to contribute to the advancement of music culture around the world. Through the cooperation of many outstanding individuals in the world of classical music and the involvement of world-famous conductors such as Hideo Saito,

Takashi Asahina, Seiji Ozawa, Yuzo Toyama, the Competition has gained an international reputation among aspiring conductors as a gateway to worldwide success.

This year marks the 16th competition for conducting and the event's 45th anniversary. A total of 180 talented young people from 29 countries and regions submitted applications, and after rigorous screening by the nominating committee in June this year, 24 individuals from nine countries (one each from Austria, Israel, Korea, Poland, Russia, the Slovak Republic, Taiwan and the United States, and 16 from Japan) were invited to participate in the first preliminary round, which was held on the first two days of the Competition. Each contestant conducted the New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra playing 20 minutes of Beethoven's Symphony No.1 before a panel of judges composed of nine preeminent conductors and academics from Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Japan and Russia.

After the judging was complete, seven of the 24 challengers were selected to advance to the second preliminary round, with each contestant conducting three required pieces—Stravinsky:

Concerto in D for string orchestra, Chopin: *Piano Concerto No.2*, and Sibelius: *Symphony No. 1*. After two full days of performances with the New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra, it took the panel of judges an hour of deliberation and discussion to select the three finalists: Mayana Ishizaki from Japan, Yuko Tanaka from Japan, and Maja Metelska from Poland.

After two further days of practice with the internationally acclaimed Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, the final round of the competition was held on Sunday, November 4 at the magnificent concert hall of Tokyo Opera City. In the first half of the final session, each of the three finalists conducted the same designated piece, Weber's *Overture for Opera 'Euryanthe'*, creating striking contrasts with each other in their expression.

In the final section of the competition, the finalists conducted a piece of their own choosing submitted at the time of application. Mendelssohn: *Symphony No. 3 'Scottish'* was selected by Yuko Tanaka; Beethoven: *Symphony No. 3 'Eloica'* was chosen by Maja Metelska; and Dvorak: *Symphony No. 8* was nominated by Mayana Ishizaki. Each composition was sensitively and skillfully conducted, and each finalist drew applause from the audience.

The weeklong 16th Tokyo International Music Competition 2012 concluded with an awards ceremony attended by all members of the judging panel, representatives of the cosponsor and supporting organizations, as well as by officials of the New Japan Philharmonic and Tokyo Symphony orchestras. Although no one took first, second or third prizes in the competition due to the extremely rigorous judging criteria, the special Hideo Saito Award went to Maja Metelska, and the Audience Award was presented to Mayana Ishizaki. The Encouragement Award and Honorable Mention title were awarded all three finalists.

At the Press Conference held on Monday, November 5, Saito Award winner Maja Metelska commented, "It was a rare and valuable experience to be able to conduct these internationally acclaimed orchestras—both the New Japan Philharmonic and Tokyo Symphony Orchestra. I am very grateful to the jury for giving me this opportunity and for awarding me the special prize of the late maestro Hideo Saito, a conductor I hold in the highest regard. I hope that this competition will open up future possibilities in my conducting career."

Russian Group and Japanese Youths Battle It Out

On the autumn evening of October 12 in Tokyo, *The Battle 2012*—an international street dance competition—broke out between a group of Russian dancers known as Predatorz Crew and a Japanese alliance of young dancing forces in front of an enthusiastic crowd gathered at Nakano Sun Plaza Hall in Tokyo, with the Russian team claiming victory.

Street dancing—commonly known as hip-hop dancing or breakdancing—has been a mainstay of modern urban culture since the end of the 20th century. In the 1970s, a variety of freestyle dancing evolved on the streets of New York City, and



Members of 'The Battle' from Russia and Japan

has flourished among young people across the United States and eventually around the world in the new millennium. Early on in its history, constant improvisation created new and exciting styles, including hip-hop, breaking, popping, locking, gliding and waving among many others, and made street dance a truly fun, exciting and inspirational experience for many youths and street gangs in urban areas. Instead of violent fights, street dancers started to compete with each other, showing off their individual techniques; these competitions have developed into today's 'battles'. Although battles are still competitive, the interaction and collaboration that occurred on the streets brought many youths together with a deep sense of solidarity that crossed barriers of geography, language and race, and created spaces for the globalization of urban culture.

To develop mutual understanding and friendship among the youth of different countries, Min-On initiated *The Battle* series to bring a street dance competition to the stage, and invited groups of dancers from Korea and China to Japan on three occasions in 2007, 2009 and 2010. This year, the world-champion breakdance group, Predatorz Crew, was invited from Moscow, Russia to collaborate with a team of popular Japanese hip-hop dancers for a 19-city tour of *The Battle* across Japan from October 12 through November 6. In part one of the event, each team introduced its own unique moves to rhythms supplied by DJ Mar Ski, which were judged by the applause of the audience. During the finale, the teams performed a collaborative production entitled *Aiming for a New Era Above the Clouds*, sketching a plot in which an age of war turns to an age of solidarity. The teams celebrated together the great triumph of *The Battle 2012* with the enthusiastic applause of the audience.

The Betawi Cultural Institute Presents Unique Performing Arts

On the morning of October 23, a delegation of the Betawi Cultural Institute (LKB) from Indonesia, headed by its chairman, H. Tatang Hidayat, paid a courtesy visit to the Min-On Culture Center in Tokyo.

Indonesia is home to more than 500 ethnic groups, and its cultural diversity is unparalleled in Southeast Asia. Among those ethnic groups, the Betawi are the descendants of people living around Batavia (the colonial name for Jakarta). They have their own unique culture in terms of song, dance, music, and other traditions. At the beginning of a formal meeting during the visit, Mr. Hidayat remarked that the Betawi Cultural Institute was established for the purposes of not only preserving Betawi culture but also promoting harmonious coexistence with other cultures in Indonesia and fostering friendly relations with foreign cultures. He expressed his deep admiration of Min-On's remarkable record of global cultural exchanges, and extended his sincere gratitude for this significant opportunity of introducing Betawi culture to Japan.

After enjoying a tour of the Min-On Music Museum, the delegation visited the Soka University in Hachioji and held a Japan-Indonesia goodwill concert with performances of ethnic music and traditional dance at the student center on the campus. After the performance, the Institute bestowed "The Highest Commendation for an Honorable Cultural Figure" upon Min-On founder Daisaku Ikeda in honor of his



A member of institute plays an Indonesian Angklung on display in the Music Museum

contribution to promoting cultural exchange and world peace. Min-On President Hiroyasu Kobayashi received the certificate on Mr. Ikeda's behalf.

A Nation United in Music and Dance

Interview with H.E. Dr. William G. M. Brandful, Ambassador of the Republic of Ghana



“ In Ghana, the concept of the formation of cultural institutions and groups like the Ghana Dance Ensemble goes back to the time of our founding fathers.

Min-On: Congratulations on a successful Japan tour of the esteemed Ghana Dance Ensemble! Please share with us your impressions of today's performance.

Ambassador Brandful: It was a wonderfully enjoyable performance, and I was especially impressed that everything was of such high quality. I have long thought that we, as an African nation, could contribute something to Japan, so I am very happy with what we have accomplished today through this onstage collaboration before a capacity audience. I am proud that we have been able to give something to the Japanese people, especially at this difficult time for Japan. I also appreciate the fact that so many of my African colleagues, ambassadors and diplomats from so many countries attended. I extended invitations to various people, and almost everyone came. It was indeed a good sign of collaboration and solidarity among the African nations, and of friendship with many other countries.

At the same time, I am very proud that we were able to bring the Ghana Dance Ensemble all the way to Japan, both as a representative of African countries, and in commemoration of the 55th anniversary of Ghana's independence. These wonderful performances make us proud of our culture, and proud to be African.

Min-On: Since the early 1960s, Dr. Ikeda, the founder of Min-On, has said that the 21st century will be the century of Africa. Taking up that vision as a theme, Min-On initiated a concert series entitled *A Musical Voyage*

Across Africa. Today's performance saw that vision blossom onstage.

Ambassador: I would like to sincerely thank the Min-On Concert Association. I was able to go back to the Min-On founder's vision and learn about his profound thoughts on cultural exchange. I deeply admire what has been achieved by Min-On to realize collaborations with many different countries—both in Africa

that a cultural institution like the Ghana Dance Ensemble has survived through many difficult challenges over the years, and has continued presenting a positive image of Ghana and Africa through its wonderful cultural performances.

Min-On: Today's performance gave us a vivid insight into African music and performing arts. Music and rhythm, singing and dancing seem to be important aspects of daily life in Africa.

Ambassador: I believe music is important for all people, not just in Africa but also all over the world. I love music, too: when I was at school, I taught myself to play the tenor saxophone and the piano, and still now, whenever possible, I try to make time for music in one way or another.

Particularly in Africa, musical culture is an important part of people's day-to-day lives. Ghana has many different styles of traditional and modern music

because of its multiplicity of ethnic groups and the cosmopolitan makeup of the nation. The Ghana Dance Ensemble was originally established at the Institute of African Studies in the University of Ghana in 1962. Based therefore on extensive research into and study of the heritage of music and dance in Ghana and Africa, the company has developed and its members trained in the rich variety of Ghana's dance cultures, epitomizing the exhilarating creativity of African culture.

I deeply appreciate how each member of the Ghana Dance Ensemble has made the long trip from Ghana to Tokyo to deliver uplifting,



Adzogbo, a medley of music and dance from the neighboring country of Benin, performed by Ghana Dance Ensemble

and around the world. In Ghana, the concept of the formation of cultural institutions and groups like the Ghana Dance Ensemble goes back to the time of our founding fathers. The first president of the Republic of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, had a vision of bringing the whole continent together—not just Ghana, but eventually all of Africa—by promoting such cultural activities. That is why those institutions were established specifically in the areas of the performing arts, music and cultural activities, sports, and so on. These areas were highlighted for the development of Ghana and Africa, and I am very happy

entertaining and enjoyable performances that represent African musical culture, and I am proud that as cultural ambassadors of Ghana they have enriched the cultural ties between Ghana and Japan.

Min-On: What do you think is the significance of the kind of international cultural exchange promoted by the Min-On Concert Association for the last half century?

Ambassador: I can confidently say that cultural exchanges are very significant for any country. The Min-On Concert Association has proven this significance by consistently being involved over a long period in concert activities that include various fields of the performing arts, and at the same time the Association has organized countless cultural exchanges with many different countries. Min-On even sponsors whole tours from beginning to end, such as this one for the Ghana Dance Ensemble. It is for us—especially as we have come all the way from Africa—very significant to be able to introduce African culture to Japanese people, and obviously it is beneficial for our country to increase understanding of Ghana in Japan. I have monitored the progress of this tour so as to look after the members of the Dance Ensemble during their visit to Japan, and have found that everybody in the troupe is very happy and appreciative of the kind way



Left: Young men energetically dance *Jira*; Right: *Atsea* is a popular dance at social events for young people

that Min-On has taken care of everyone, and also how Min-On has professionally organized the tour logistics. All that consideration, and the care given to minute details, made possible the realization of such a successful performance tour by the Ghana Dance Ensemble in Japan. Once again, I reiterate my deepest appreciation of Min-On and, at the same time, I hope it will be possible to have

other collaborations between Min-On and the Ghana Dance Ensemble in the future. Both Ghana as a country and the Dance Ensemble as an institution know that we still have many things to learn from Japan; therefore, we hope this bridge of friendship built by Min-On and the Dance Ensemble will bring ever-closer cooperation between Japan and Ghana for the future of Africa.

From the Editor

» Every year since 1983, Min-On Founder, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, has written and published a peace proposal that is submitted to the United Nations. In a portion of his 2001 proposal, entitled *Creating and Sustaining a Century of Life: Challenges for a New Era* published at the beginning of this new century, he wrote about Africa as follows:

» “Africa is the birthplace of humankind. It has been a continent of hope, giving rise to a rich diversity of civilizations since ancient times, which have given humanity numerous blessings in many areas, including philosophy and science. It has long been my belief that the twenty-first century must be the century of Africa. This conviction is in part rooted in the experience of my first visit to the UN Headquarters in 1960. There, I witnessed and was deeply impressed by the energy and vitality of the African delegates participating in the General Assembly and various committee meetings. Indeed, 1960 was an extraordinary year for Africa, with seventeen African nations winning their independence. From that time I began to develop friendships with the political, cultural, and intellectual leaders of various African countries, hoping to contribute to the realization of a century of

Africa. Moreover, as the founder of Soka University and the Min-On Concert Association, I have been actively engaged in promoting broad educational and cultural exchange at the grassroots level.”

» Based upon the founder’s conviction, and to develop mutual understanding and friendships with various African countries, Min-On initiated its first cultural exchange with Guinea in 1971, followed by Kenya in 1991, Egypt in 1992, Tanzania in 1992, South Africa in 1995, Ghana in 1997, Ethiopia in 1999, Zambia in 2001, Morocco in 2003, Senegal in 2005, Madagascar in 2007, Cameroon in 2010, and again with Ghana this year. In 1997, Min-On held a special exhibit of Ghanaian culture in celebration of the 40th anniversary of Ghana’s independence, with Ghana’s former president, Jerry John Rawlings, in attendance at the Min-On Culture Center in Tokyo. This year, commemorating its 55th anniversary, Min-On hosted a splendid performance of the Ghana Dance Ensemble in the presence of ambassadors and diplomats from 21 different African nations. It was a magnificent celebration of the advancement of Min-On’s cultural movement, reinforcing our hope for the realization of a Century of Africa.

From the Min-On Music Museum Collection



"Bologna" Harpsichord 1680s, 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.

Min-On's "Bologna" Harpsichord is now displayed in the newly opened Western Japan Branch of the Min-On Music Museum in Kobe, and played for the museum visitors to enjoy the same graceful sounds as were heard from the instrument more than three centuries ago.

Min-On's Bologna harpsichord

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 105 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

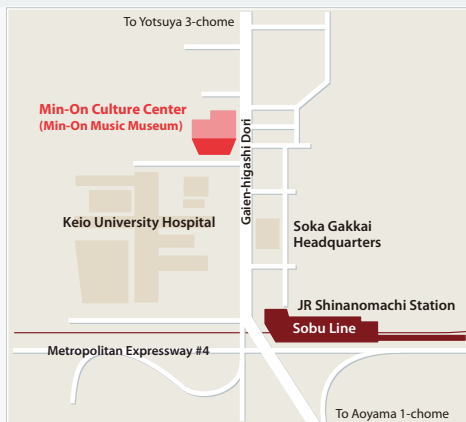
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Music Library

Open: 11:00-18:30 (Tuesday, Thursday & Saturday)
(Closed on public holidays)

Closed: August 1-15, Year-end / New Year



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