

harmony

Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association



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An Epic Dance Showdown—*The Battle 2015*

The Min-On Concert Association has offered a wide range of musical, cultural and educational programs to an ever-growing audience for over 50 years. They have contributed to music and art flourishing wildly among the general public and cultivated artistic sentiments, especially among young people, by including new and fresh styles of music and performing arts.

Among the new styles of performing arts created and developed during the last half century, street dancing—including hip-hop dancing and breakdancing—is the most popular mainstay of modern urban culture for younger generations. One of Min-On's programs successful in attracting younger audiences is a series of international street dance competitions called *The Battle*. Min-On initiated *The Battle* series to bring a street dance competition to the stage for a wider audience, inviting groups of dancers from Korea and China to Japan on three occasions in 2007, 2009 and 2010, with the world-champion breakdance group visiting from Russia in 2012.

On October 27, in front of a capacity crowd at Nakano Sun Plaza Hall in Tokyo, *The Battle 2015*—the fifth installment of the series—broke out between veteran dance crews from Team USA, led by Tony GO GO, and a Japanese alliance of young dance forces, led by Kite. *The Battle 2015* will continue in front of thousands of audience members in 24 cities across Japan through December 9, 2015.

It is not known exactly when and where the original form of street dancing was born. In the 1970s a variety of freestyle dancing evolved on the streets of New York City, and has since flourished across the United States and around the world in the new millennium. As the years passed, constant improvisation created new and exciting styles of dance such as hip-hop, breaking, popping, locking, gliding and more. Street dancing became a truly fun, exciting and inspirational experience for many adolescents and even street gangs in urban areas. As its popularity increased, street dancers started to compete with each other, showing off their individual techniques, and instead of violent altercations, these street dance competitions have developed into public performances of so-called 'battles' among the younger generation. Although battles are still competitive, the interaction and collaboration that occurred on the streets brought myriad people together with a sense of solidarity and created a space for the globalization of urban culture. Today in Japanese junior high schools, hip-hop dance class is part of the required physical education curriculum, and dance battles are enjoyed even amongst elementary school children.

In the middle of the nationwide tour of *The Battle 2015*, we interviewed the leading dancers, including Tony GO GO from Team USA and Kite from Team Japan.

Communication through the Power of Dance

Interview with **Tony GO GO** and **Kite**

Min-On: How did you start your dancing career and get involved in the art of street dance?

Tony GO GO: As a kid, I was so inspired by tap-dancing and started learning the techniques. After that, I became interested in playing music and joined an orchestra in Texas. Then, I moved to California with my mother, but there was no orchestra over there, which is how I found another hobby—dance. Around that time, in the early 1970s, the television show “Soul Train” started on TV and I was so excited. A friend of mine from high school, a professional dancer named Greg “Campbellock” Jr., introduced me to many of the most famous dancers at that time. Together they formed a famous dance crew known as The Lockers. That’s how I really got my start in the dance world. I started doing a crazy dance called “Campbellocking” with my friends from high school. The three of us performed on Soul Train and then formed a group called The Go Go Brothers. That’s how my journey began.

Kite: I was playing baseball for more than 10 years, from my high school days through college. But I broke my shoulder and had to give up baseball. At that time, I got interested in breakdancing, which often appeared on TV. Also, some of my friends were doing hip-hop dance and breakdance, so I switched from baseball to dancing. And when I was in college, I started dancing more seriously.

Min-On: How do you feel about street dancing and what is significant in ‘battles’?

Tony: Competitive battling is all right and in the underground, they battle a lot, and it’s okay and good. But to me, dance is love and a tool to communicate with other people, above all else. When you try to communicate with people, even if you cannot speak, you can use your body to communicate. That’s dance to me. I would like to tell everyone to keep the love and keep the positive spirit so the world can become a better place.

Kite: I think it is difficult to describe the attractiveness of street dancing. Even if everybody is dancing to the same music, each person has their own unique expression through dance. Tony said that through dance, you can communicate with people even if you cannot speak. I had an opportunity to give dancing lessons at a school for deaf and mute persons in college. Although I could not communicate with words, I really felt I could communicate with them through dance. I think the *bon odor*i dance is the same. People dance in a circle at Japanese summer festivals and it acts as a wonderful form of communication amongst the people, to embrace a sense of solidarity in their community.



Min-On: Min-On has promoted various programs for international cultural exchange. What do you think about *The Battle* series and what did you experience so far on this tour?

Kite: I participated in *The Battle* in the past, and we danced with people from China and Korea. Although the political climate between Japan and both those countries wasn’t the best, I made good friends in China and Korea through *The Battle*. Even when I went to Korea for a dancing workshop, I was a little bit nervous about how I would be treated, but they welcomed me warmly. During this current battle with Team USA, although there are obvious differences in appearance and cultural background between us, we have been able to communicate heart to heart with each other through dance.

Tony: This is my first time experience to work with Min-On, and it’s a beautiful thing from what I have seen. It’s a wonderful project and good for the world. I think Min-On is doing a beautiful job to bring together people from other countries. When I started out dancing, basically we were all consumed by violence. But it became a way out for us, and we used dance as a tool to get out of that situation. That’s why we are doing what we do, just like Min-On. We want to change the culture of violence and negativity to a culture of love and peace. I hope Min-On will keep pursuing this avenue they have created.

Music without Boundaries – Romani Music Travels to Japan

Music is always seasoned by the ethnic and national characteristics of different peoples, and great performing arts are a treasure that encompasses the spirit of all humanity. Romani music does not belong to any particular country with national boundaries, but it is the music of the Romani people, who have their origins in Northern India, although they are now largely settled in Europe. Historically, the Romani people were entertainers and tradesmen who travelled vast distances, often referred to as the so-called Gypsy—although this is now considered a derogatory term. The unique sounds and rhythms of Romani music have been developed under a multitude of influences, starting with Indian roots and adding elements of Asian, Middle Eastern and European musical cultures.

The first-ever performance of the Flairck Global Orchestra in Japan was held on August 27 in Aichi prefecture and subsequently continued on a 13-city national tour through September 20, concluding in Akita prefecture. The band name *Flairck* means 'wing' and it is an acoustic instrumental group featuring diverse forms of chamber music and classically influenced 'traditional' music with touches of jazz and improvisation. The Flairck Global Orchestra is based in the Netherlands and is led by Erik Visser, along with 12 other musicians from five different countries around the world. Their

unique rhythms and sounds, accompanied with their energetic yet sophisticated performance of diverse styles, drew great applause from the first time listeners of Romani music at every venue across Japan.



The Vibrant Sounds of Mariachi: *Viva! Mexico 2015*



Mariachi, internationally known as Mexican folk music, is one of the most popular genres of international music in Japan. Mariachi originally began as regional, rural folk music from central Mexico. In the 20th century, along with farm workers moving to the city, mariachi musicians developed new styles of performance in city plazas and restaurants, and this regional folk music gradually transformed into an urban phenomenon. In the process of its development, the Mexican government became involved in cultural promotion of mariachi as an international symbol of Mexican identity, first with radio and sound recordings and later through films. In 2011 UNESCO recognized mariachi as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Mexico.

Min-On initiated this concert series, entitled *Viva! Mexico*, in 1993 to showcase performances from acclaimed mariachi artists and Mexican musical groups. This year, *Viva! Mexico* featured an up-and-coming mariachi band named 'Mariachi Mexico Bravo' accompanied by the popular

female singer Bibiana from 'El Lugar del Mariachi,' a famous mariachi theater in Mexico. Its 33-city Japan tour started in Hachioji, Tokyo on September 16 and concluded in Sapporo, Hokaido on October 28, with a capacity audience at every venue. Each member of the band—consisting of two violins, two trumpets, a classical guitar, a high-pitched guitar called a vihuela and a large bass guitar known as a guitarrón—dresses in a particular Traje style costume, which includes ankle boots, a broad-rimmed sombrero, a short jacket and a large bowtie, creating the classic mariachi flamboyance. The singer Bibiana wears a variety of bright colorful dresses, a beautiful flower blooming on each stage scene celebrating the festivity of Mexico. They performed various styles of cheerful and vibrant mariachi, including a number of romantic and passionate songs such as *Quien Sera*, *Besame Mucho*, *La Malaguena* and other Mexican favorites. During this year's Japan tour, *Viva! Mexico* again earned thunderous applause from thousands of enthusiastic mariachi fans.

Tokyo International Music Competition Discovers Protégé Conductors

The Min-On Concert Association, in cooperation with the Association of Japanese Symphony Orchestras, held The 17th Tokyo International Music Competition for Conducting at the majestic Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall this October.

Since it was first held in 1967, the competition has developed into the foremost internationally recognized competition for conducting today. Many previous contestants are now active around the world, including Tadaaki Otaka and Junichi Hirokami, who are also current members of the Judging Panel.

This year's competition drew 239 applicants from 40 countries and regions—the highest number ever. After the initial screenings by the Nomination Committee, 16 applicants from seven different countries participated as contestants in the first preliminary round, held on the first two days of the competition. Each contestant conducted The Japan Philharmonic Orchestra playing two required pieces: Mozart's *Symphony No. 39* and Bartok's *Divertimento for String Orchestra*, in front of a panel of judges and a public audience.

In the second round, after two full days of performances by the selected eight contestants, who conducted the internationally acclaimed New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra's performance of three required pieces (Akira Miyoshi's *Concerto for Orchestra*, Liszt's symponic poem *Les Preludes* and Saint-Saens *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso*) the panel of judges



Diego Martin Etxebarria conducts the New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra

selected the four finalists: Ondrej Vrabec from the Czech Republic, Diego Martin Etxebarria from Spain, Gen Ota from Japan and Corinna Niemeyer from Germany.

The final round of the competition was held on Sunday, October 18 before a larger audience at the same venue. In the first half of the final round, each of the four finalists conducted the same required piece: Brahms' *Variations on a Theme* by Joseph Haydn. In the second half, each conducted a composition of their own choice. It took the panel of judges more than an hour of deliberation and discussion to select the winners.

The week-long competition concluded with an awards ceremony, presenting first place

and the Special Hideo Saito Award to Diego Martin Etxebarria, second place and the Audience Award to Gen Ota, third place to Corinna Niemeyer and the honorable mention title to Ondrej Vrabec. A certificate, medal and cash award were given to each finalist. Additionally, the Asahi Breweries Award was presented to the first, second and third place winners as a supplementary prize by Asahi Breweries, Ltd., a co-sponsor of the competition.

"It's so difficult to describe my feelings right now," said first prize winner, Diego Martin Etxebarria. "I felt so comfortable throughout the competition, and the resonance with the orchestra was sensational. I will never forget this experience."



(Left to right) **Atsuko Suzuki** - Presenter of Asahi Breweries Award; **Junichi Hirokami** (Japan) - Judge - Chief Conductor and Music Advisor, Kyoto Symphony Orchestra, Professor of Conducting; **Gunter Kahlert** (Germany) - Judge - Professor for Conducting, University of Music Franz Liszt Weimar; **Hubert Soudant** (Netherlands) - Judge - Conductor Laureate, Tokyo Symphony Orchestra; **Yuzo Toyama** - Chairperson, Panel of Judges, Permanent Conductor, NHK Symphony Orchestra; First prize winner **Diego Martin Etxebarria** from Spain; Second prize winner **Gen Ota** from Japan; Third prize winner **Corinna Miemeyer** from Germany; Honorable Mention finalist **Ondrej Vrabec** from Czech Republic; **Mike George** (England) - Judge - Senior Producer, BBC Philharmonic; **Werner Hink** (Austria) - Judge - Former First Concertmaster, Vienna Philharmonic, Professor of Violin; **Tadaaki Otaka** (Japan) - Judge - Permanent Conductor, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Special Professor of Conducting; **Ken Takaseki** (Japan) - Judge - Principle Conductor, Tokyo City Philharmonic Orchestra, Professor of Conducting; **Hiroyasu Kobayashi** - Chairperson, Executive Committee, Min-On President

Bright Futures Await Winners of 17th Competition

Interview with **Hubert Soudant (left)** of the Netherlands, Conductor Laureate, Tokyo Symphony Orchestra and **Mike George (right)**, UK, Senior Producer, BBC Philharmonic, of the Panel of Judges for The 17th Tokyo International Music Competition for Conducting in 2015



Without these competitions, I would never have the career I do today, and I could never have enjoyed a life of making music.



Hubert Soudant (left) and Mike George (right)

Min-On: The 17th Tokyo International Music Competition is now over. Please share your impressions and general view on the entire competition.

Hubert Soudant: The entire Min-On Music Competition is a really beautiful thing, and the standard of this year's competition was extremely high. I think we can look back at the entire competition and judge it as a very successful one.

Mike George: My impression has also been very positive. The Min-On Concert Association has done many good things for this competition. To stand in front of 90 musicians for a day is a rare treat—especially when it's two fine orchestras like the Japan Philharmonic and the New Japan Philharmonic. Standing up there in front of the orchestra and communicating with the audience . . . unless you can do that, you cannot really master conducting.

Min-On: Chairperson of the judging panel Maestro Toyama stated that the Min-On Music Competition for Conducting is now one of the three best competitions in the world.

George: I think he could well be right. It is very difficult to tell. Success is determined in the long term, particularly for a conducting competition. In a 10-year time frame, will that person still have a career? However, Min-On has been hosting a fantastic competition for so many years.

Soudant: I myself took part in three big competitions. What I can say is that without these competitions, I would never have the career I do today, and I could never have enjoyed a life of making music, let alone had the chance to work with such splendid orchestras. The orchestras we had playing for this competition are not secondary orchestras—they're first class. This is also something very important—to feel the quality of an orchestra as a conductor. We are all very blessed that Min-On continues to host this competition for young people.

Min-On: Mr. George, I imagine that as the senior producer of the BBC Philharmonic, you

were judging with the eyes and ears of a producer?

George: Yes, that is partially correct. I, along with my colleagues back in Manchester, run an orchestra. When I'm observing a conductor working with other orchestras, I am ultimately looking for somebody who can make an orchestra sound really different, or bring their own sound to the orchestra. I think yesterday in the competition we found someone who may prove able to do that.

Min-On: Mr. Soudant, as a conductor yourself, you must have been judging from the eyes of a conductor?

Soudant: Of course, but not only from the eyes of conductor. I remember participating in similar competitions with fear and nervousness. The contestants are all afraid, and probably not sleeping, not eating. I was very tired yesterday evening, because in spirit I was conducting together with all the young conductors and I hoped they would do well. I was very happy with the results yesterday evening.

Min-On: I would like to ask you both of your views on each prize winner, starting with the first prize winner, Diego Martin Etxebarria.

George: I think the largest barrier to his career will be his name—lots of people will find it quite difficult to pronounce (*chuckles*). However, he is somebody who makes the orchestra sound different. He brought a particular form of communication to the orchestra, and that was probably one of the factors that made the judges think he was qualified for first place in this competition.

Soudant: My view is that he's already at the end of his development phase. He has already stabilized as a conductor. I think the level of performance he produced yesterday and the maturity he's shown solidifies him as a conductor already. That's not to say that he couldn't experience enormous change in the future, but he is already a capable career conductor.

Min-On: How about Gen Ota, who took second place?

Soudant: I was astonished to see this young Japanese conductor—21 years old and such talent. Honestly speaking, I had hoped he could win, but he is still a little bit too young. I can see that Japan again now has a wonderful young talent with a bright future.

George: Gen Ota is a very special discovery for this competition. He's just 21 years old, and we can only imagine what he might become in the future. He is so confident in front of the orchestra. He is very persuasive and the orchestra can rely on him. I'm sure he will continue to grow and mature musically.

Min-On: What advice would you give him?

Soudant: I was his age when I started making music. But he is much better than I was when

I was 21. I don't want him to make the same mistakes I did, of immediately jumping into conducting endlessly. I would suggest to him—or even the Japanese government or the Japanese Orchestra Society—that he go to Vienna and study, listen and be surrounded by great music, because this young man needs the right impulse and surroundings at this time.

George: I would also say to live a life outside of music, and truly enjoy the music. He has created this great musical opportunity, but life gives you rich experiences and life gives you other things that will bring your music to another level of greatness.

Min-On: What about the third place contestant, Corinna Niemyer?

Soudant: In some ways, she is similar to the first place winner: she has already stabilized as a conductor, she's an excellent musician and is passionate, so the judges could feel her musicality. Yesterday, she conducted the most beautiful variation and made beautiful sounds and beautiful lines. There were some mistakes, but that is not so important. She is very musically gifted.

Mike George: I think she is a very exciting prospect. We have far too few female conductors in this world. I was very excited by her performance and she won the competition for me. Interestingly, I felt she actually grew through the competition. She had strength in the first round, but she improved as the competition went on. I think she could have a great career in front of her, and I wish her the very best.



First prize winner Diego Martina Etxebarria of Spain, third place contestant Corinna Niemyer, of Germany and second place runner-up Gen Ota, of Japan

From the Editor

- » During the interview with the dancers of *The Battle 2015*, Tony GO GO and Kite, they both discussed street dancing as an art of communication with other people and helping to overcome misunderstandings and negativity among people. Tony, as a dance teacher, has always tried to teach young people to move their body freely while keeping a pure heart and staying positive, embracing love. Min-On Founder Dr. Ikeda once wrote, "Music speaks directly to the heart. This response, this echo within the heart, is proof that human hearts can transcend the barriers of time and space and nationality. Exchanges in the field of culture can play an important role in enabling people to overcome mistrust and prejudice and build peace." We are all sincerely wishing *The Battle* series to continue serving the cause of world peace.
- » The 17th Tokyo International Music Competition in 2015 is now successfully completed. Looking back on its history, there were

quite a few issues facing the first competition for conductors in 1967. Not only did Min-On need the financial means to secure an orchestra for an extended period, the orchestra needed to have the capacity to perform according to the ability of the conductors. What's more, it was necessary to invite Japan's top conductors to act as judges. However, all these issues were successfully overcome, and the first executive committee and panel of judges were filled with leading, internationally active conductors, as though the Japanese conducting world had come together to show its solidarity. The first chairperson for the Panel of Judges was Maestro Hideo Saito, who was a great conductor, cellist and educator that raised many internationally known musicians, such as the famous Maestro Seiji Ozawa. The Hideo Saito Award, funded by donations from his family, was established to honor his achievements and to encourage the development of capable successors. This year it was presented to Diego Martin Etxebarria, the first prize winner.

From the Min-On Music Museum Collection



**“Conrad Graf” Fortepiano
1834, Vienna, Austria**

Conrad Graf was one of the most acclaimed fortepiano makers in Vienna between 1822 and 1842. He was appointed keyboard instrument maker to the Austrian court in 1824 and received a gold medal at the Austrian Industrial Products Exhibition in 1835.

This splendid 6.5-octave instrument with 80 keys was built in 1834 by Conrad Graf. Its beautiful walnut-veneered oak case is constructed almost entirely of wood, which produces a beautiful, elegant and romantic sound quite different from modern pianos, which are constructed around a metal frame. Identical Graf fortepianos were used by many well-known composers, including Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Liszt and Brahms.

Unusually, this particular model has five pedals, including a so-called “Turkish Pedal” for playing bells and a drum built into in the piano case, instead of the usual four pedals for controlling dampers.

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.

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!

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

