

harmony

Newsletter of the Min-On Concert Association

Winter 2015/2016

No. 19

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The Idan Raichel Project Offers a Cross-Cultural Experience for Israel and Japan

Half a century ago, very few ordinary citizens of Japan had the opportunity to enjoy concerts performed by first-rate foreign artists. After its founding in 1963, the Min-On Concert Association invited the internationally acclaimed pianist Frank Pelleg from the State of Israel to Japan in 1965, beginning Min-On's international cultural exchange program inviting musicians and artists from foreign countries.

In December 2015, which marked the 50th anniversary of Min-On's first concert performed by a foreign artist, by curious coincidence, another Israeli artist visited Japan. The Idan Raichel Project—a cross-cultural collaboration initiated by pianist Idan Raichel with artists from diverse backgrounds—came together for their first full-scale Japan tour in cooperation with the Embassy of Israel. Addressing the significance of the project as a representation of Israeli culture, the Ambassador of Israel H.E. Ruth Kahanoff remarked, “The Idan Raichel

Project echoes the story of the modern State of Israel. The group consists of immigrants from different countries, as well as Israeli-born musicians, who absorbed various influences at home and were inspired by local traditions. By setting various traditional melodies against contemporary musical approaches, Raichel has established his own original style with this group. The project is acknowledging cultural diversity and serves as a model for music acting as a bridge between cultures and people. A mosaic of languages, melodies and sounds results in an energetic and exciting performance.” She concluded with a remark to the audiences, saying, “I wish you much enjoyment in this unique cross-cultural musical experience.”

The eight-city, two-week long tour began in Niigata prefecture in northwest Japan and concluded at Tokyo's Nakano Sun Plaza Hall in front of a full house including ambassadors and diplomats from Israel and eight other countries. The concert began

with several solo piano numbers sung in Hebrew by Idan Raichel. These pieces were gentle and personal, with serene, unassuming melodies and arrangements unique to Idan's composition style. The next few songs featured Cabra Casey, a solo female vocalist of Ethiopian heritage who sang in the Ethiopian language of Amharic, and the male singer Avi Wogderess Vasa of African descent, who sang passionately in Arabic. Assorted instrumentation was played by Eyal Sela, a virtuoso of ethnic wind instruments, accompanied by Gilad Shmueli on drums, Yogev Glusman on bass and violin, and Yankale Segal playing the bass and the ethnic instruments of *tar*, *bouzouki* and *baglama*. The eclectic mix of Middle Eastern, African and Hebrew sounds drew enthusiastic applause throughout the concert, providing the capacity crowd with a unique cross-cultural musical experience, as the Ambassador of Israel H.E. Ruth Kahanoff had hoped.

Recognizing National Identity through Music

Interview with **Idan Raichel**

Min-On: This is your second tour in Japan. What are your impressions from this first nationwide tour?

Idan Raichel: This is my second opportunity to visit Japan, and I am so excited about the experience of my first national tour here. I am so impressed and very happy with our Japanese audiences, who have enthusiastically enjoyed our performances. Everyone seems to be impressed and deeply touched by our music. I had an opportunity to read the Min-On questionnaire filled out by audiences after our concerts, and I am pleasantly surprised to see how closely they are observing our performance. We have all been warmly welcomed and felt appreciated by Japanese people wherever we go in Japan. I think listening to instrumental music for two hours is not always an easy task, and only open-minded people can appreciate such a performance. At every concert towards the finale, our audience's anticipation steadily escalated, and we also became very excited.



Idan Raichel visited the Min-On Culture Center in Tokyo during his Japan tour



We gained so much confidence in our role as a cultural bridge between Israel and other countries through this tour. It is our greatest pleasure to develop a deeper understanding of our homeland, Israel, through our performance alongside the Japanese people.

Min-On: At what age did you start playing a musical instrument?

Idan: At the age of nine, I began learning the accordion. At the same time, I was interested in Roma music from Eastern European countries, tango, and ethnic music from many other countries. I started to play the piano at the age of sixteen, but because I was never classically trained, I am not a very good pianist. If you asked me which I would choose between the accordion and the piano, I would probably say the accordion. The accordion has highly influenced my musical career and greatly affected my original compositions and melodic inventions.

Min-On: We heard that you were involved in jazz performance during your high school days. Who is your favorite pianist?

Idan: I like Herbie Hancock and Keith Jarrett. I believe Herbie has greatly influenced and inspired anyone who starts playing jazz. He is such an open-minded artist, who has always been ahead of the times and blazed new trails in his music. I think Keith Jarrett plays the most superb piano solos anywhere. His extended piano solos could be called a genuine one-man orchestra. Every time I hear one of his solos, it unwittingly brings me to a special place. He truly transcends time and

space and enralls his audience.

Min-On: People have categorized your music as World Music. How do you feel about that?

Idan: I don't mind being classified as World Music because the term World Music really represents the diverse cultures of my homeland Israel. Listening to the songs of Édith Piaf reminds us of France, and listening to Bob Marley immediately brings images of Jamaica to our mind. By the same token, if listening to my music reminds people of Israel, I would be very happy about that, because it means that people see me as an artist distinctly representing Israel.

Min-On: Who would you like to collaborate with in the future?

Idan: I'd love to collaborate with some Japanese artists who have been introducing Japanese traditional music to the world. For example, players of Japanese traditional instruments such as the *shamisen* and *shakuhachi*. I want to collaborate with artists continually aiming to introduce and share their sounds with the whole world.

Exhibition of Auto-Player Instruments Opens at the Min-On Music Museum

The Min-On Music Museum, located inside the Min-On Culture Center in Shinanomachi, Tokyo, is just one of a handful of museums specializing in music from around the world. Aside from a large collection of musical scores, musical reference materials and recordings spanning many genres, it has four exhibition rooms: a classical piano room, special exhibition room, music box exhibition room and instrument exhibition room. These are free of charge and open to the public. In particular, the classical piano room has a rare

collection of antique harpsichords and fortepianos. These pieces are not only exhibitions; they are also played on the hour to give museum visitors a taste of their original sound. These pianos are the same models used by celebrated composers Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Chopin, who cherished the sounds of these delicate instruments hundreds of years ago.

On New Year's Day, 2016, one of the exhibition rooms in the museum was newly opened as a comprehensive exhibition of automatic player instruments, including various antique and modern music boxes, a variety of historical recording instruments including cylinder phonographs and disc gramophones, a hand-cranked street pipe organ and a fairy-tale organ, as well as mechanical player pianos. Mirroring the style of other exhibitions, the historical heritage of the automatic player instruments comes alive through the hourly performance of the pieces in this exhibition room, too. Visitors can also enjoy actual performances of world-renowned pianists and composers from a previous era, which are recorded on a museum collection of some 1000 paper rolls for playing by our Welte Mignon Reproducing Piano.

Since its opening in 1997, the Min-On Music Museum has attracted more than 1.6 million visitors, and will continue its role as an important treasure-trove of musical culture.



Sexteto Meridional Orchestra Leads the New Tango Renaissance

Since the Min-On Tango Series was launched in 1970, Min-On has invited renowned tango artists from Argentina every year for a Japan tour. The impressive lineup has included many modern tango virtuosos and award-winning dance couples. After 45 years of the long-standing annual series, thousands of tango fans have been born in Japan. Now, they eagerly await new tango stars coming to Japan to join the prestigious series lineup every year.

Accompanied by a singer and three world-class dance couples, Sexteto Meridional will continue their first-time nationwide tour across Japan through March 2. Their dramatic performance and virtuosic musicianship will be on display through classic tango, as well as original pieces—including Pablo Estigarribia's brand new composition *Spring in Tokyo*, written as a humble dedication to Min-On founder Dr. Daisaku Ikeda. Sexteto Meridional's youthful, passionate performance is breathing new life into the blossoming tango renaissance.

On January 21, 2016 at Kanagawa Kenmin Hall in the international harbor city of Yokohama, the 47th installment of the series, entitled *Dramatic Tango—The Tango Renaissance*, was launched. Featuring the up-and-coming tango orchestra Sexteto Meridional, the tour will last one-and-a-half months and travel to 26 cities across Japan. Sexteto Meridional was formed in 2011 at the initiative of young virtuoso pianist Pablo Estigarribia, who is emerging as one of the most promising tango pianists in Buenos Aires today. His genius as a pianist was apparent as a child and he received many awards during his teenage years. Estigarribia previously joined the Min-On sponsored Japan tour of bandoneon master Victor Lavallén's orchestra in 2010. In 2015 he won the best album by a new tango artist prize for his first solo album *Tangos Para Piano*. The members of his sextet—two bandoneons, two violins, a contra-bass and his piano—are also all young talented musicians in Buenos Aires. Each of them have been members of famous tango groups, exploring various styles of expression in the Buenos Aires tango renaissance since it started in the 1990s.



The Perunika Trio and Yantra Showcase Their Dynamic Vocal Arts

A cappella—choral music sung without instrumental accompaniment—is perhaps the most archetypal art form of the human voice, which is the most basic yet highly sophisticated musical instrument we possess. A cappella performance expresses a deep range of emotion, from dire sorrow to great joy and the celestial harmony of humanity’s soul. For the last few decades, the Min-On Concert Association has held a series of a cappella concerts with a variety of prominent choral groups from different countries around the world.

From October 11 through November 10, 2015, Min-On presented the collaborative performance of two extraordinary London-based a cappella ensembles, the Perunika Trio and Yantra, to audiences in fifteen cities across Japan.

The Perunika Trio is an award winning a cappella group founded by member and artistic director Eugenia Georgieva. Inspired by her native Bulgarian traditions of folk music and vocal harmony, she formed a female a cappella trio with Victoria Mancheva and Victoria Evstatieva, who are both also of Macedonian descent, having spent their early years in Bulgarian cities. The second a cappella group, Yantra, is a unique collaboration of three singers from very different backgrounds. The Bulgarian Eugenia Georgieva of Perunika Trio also initiated this unusual vocal ensemble with vocalists Vamshikrishna Vishnudas from South India and Jeremy Birchall from the United Kingdom. The richness of their a

cappella is tastefully enhanced by multitrack recording technology, which gives an unusual depth of sound and harmony to their performance.

Their artistic passions were united onstage and manifested as a stunning Slavic repertoire incorporating Bulgarian, Macedonian and Russian traditional music and Orthodox chants into a dynamic fusion of Japanese, Indian and English vocal traditions, all through Bulgarian harmonic arrangements. It was most likely the first time the majority of Japanese audiences heard the extraordinary polyphonic style of unfamiliar Bulgarian harmonies, which was instantly greeted by thunderous applause at every venue across Japan.



Foreign Student Music Festival Expands the Circle of Global Friendship

Min-On Founder Daisaku Ikeda once remarked that international exchange students are the future leaders of their countries. Placing value on exchange students is equal to treasuring the future of that country, and forming bonds with international exchange students spreads friendship around the world.

Min-On launched the Foreign Student

Music Festival more than a quarter century ago with the grassroots aim of promoting intercultural understanding among Japanese and foreign students, to create a worldwide network of future friendship and goodwill. Since the first festival held in Kyoto in 1989, the Foreign Student Music Festival has been held alternatively in the cities of Kyoto and Osaka 25 times. Two years ago, the festival expanded to the Kanto area,

and more than 5,000 exchange students from over 100 countries and regions have participated to date.

Most recently, on December 5, 2015, international students from 12 countries and regions studying at universities and colleges in Kanagawa prefecture and its environs gathered in the harbor city of Yokohama for the 2nd Kanagawa Foreign Student Music Festival, held at Kannai Hall in front of a capacity crowd. Students performed folk songs and dances from their home countries, played ethnic musical instruments and enthusiastically sang their favorite Japanese pop songs. A student from Vietnam acting as the master of ceremonies remarked that through their musical experience onstage, the students performing could understand each other’s culture and share a bond as one human family. He stated his wish to further promote participation by international students in the Foreign Student Music Festival to expand our circle of global friendship contributing to world peace.



Uzbekistan's Silk Road Connects the Musical World

Interview with **H. E. Farrukh Tursunov**, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan to Japan



I sincerely hope that through this music festival and other exchange activities between our two countries, Japanese people will further deepen their understanding of Uzbekistan, and vice versa.



Uzbekistan, a Central Asian country situated at the crossroads of the ancient Silk Road trade routes, has played a pivotal role in cultural exchange between Eastern and Western civilizations while developing a diverse national culture. Min-On's history of cultural exchange programs with Uzbekistan dates to 1976, when Uzbek folklore artist Izmailova Galiya Bayazitovna of the former All Soviet Union Folk Dance Ensemble was invited to tour in Japan. The following year, in 1977, Min-On dispatched the Silk Road Musical Folklore Research Teams to study music and dance culture in Middle Eastern and Asian countries along the Silk Road, including Uzbekistan. Based on the research results, Min-On initiated a cultural exchange concert series entitled A Musical Voyage Along the Silk Road. The Folklore Ensemble of Uzbekistan occasionally joined the series, which brought musicians and artists from many Silk Road countries together onstage in Japan for collaborative performances. Recently, we were able to interview Ambassador Farrukh Tursunov from the Republic of Uzbekistan.

music competitions with many participating countries, as well as scientific and practical conferences with musicologists, composers and performers. The first festival, held in 1997, drew participants from 31 countries. Today, "Sharq Taronalari" has become an internationally significant music festival not only for Uzbekistan and Central Asia, but for the whole world, with representatives from 67 countries in this year's festival. Representatives from Japan have participated in "Sharq Taronalari" every time, including a group of *shakuhachi* artists in 2013 and *nagauta* and *shamisen* performers in 2015, delivering wonderful performances of traditional Japanese music.

among many countries of the world. Uzbekistan is a major junction of the ancient Silk Road trade route connecting the East and West, and we've had an understanding and respect of the cultures and traditions of other countries. Throughout our nation's history, we have engaged in peaceful exchange with many other countries, and in that sense, the "Sharq Taronalari" music festival is an extremely significant event for our nation. This year marked the 10th occurrence of the festival, and we were able to welcome President Kobayashi of the Min-On Concert Association. I am very pleased he delivered a speech at one of the conferences. Moving forward, I sincerely hope that through this music festival and other exchange activities between our two countries, Japanese people will further deepen their understanding of Uzbekistan, and vice versa.

Music is universal, uncontained by national boundaries and transcending historical and political differences. Based on that idea, President Karimov has promoted "Sharq Taronalari" to deepen mutual understanding

Min-On: First of all, please tell us about your country's famous music festival "Sharq Taronalari."

Ambassador Tursunov: "Sharq Taronalari" was established as the International Music Festival of Uzbekistan in 1997 at the initiative of President Islam Karimov. Since then, it has been held every two years in the city of Samarkand, gaining wide popularity under the support of UNESCO. The program of "Sharq Taronalari" includes traditional



President Kobayashi speaking at the 10th "Sharq Taronalari" festival

Min-On: Please briefly introduce your country for our readers.

Ambassador: There are many ancient cities in Uzbekistan with great historical value. Especially, the historic areas and ancient city centers in areas such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva and Shakhrysbabz are famous as World Heritage Sites recognized by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). These areas and cities have over 2,000 years of history, and include more than 7,000 sites of ancient medieval structural remnants, still standing. Also, Uzbekistan is full of natural beauty,

including lakes and mountains, where people can enjoy sports and rock climbing. Eco-tourism is a fast-growing trend as an active form of recreation here. Medical tourism has also been attracting more and more people domestically and internationally to resorts for various medical treatments in a refreshing atmosphere.

There are even beautiful ski resorts in Uzbekistan, and one of those resorts, called Chimgan, reminds me of the scenery of Hokkaido, Japan. Many well-maintained golf courses are also available. Uzbekistan is a country that people of all age groups can enjoy. It is a fascinating and beautiful country along the Great Silk Road, a crossroads of Eastern and Western cultures. I really hope that more Japanese people will be able to visit and enjoy Uzbekistan.

Min-On: Min-On initiated a cultural exchange program with Uzbekistan in 1976 during the era of the former Soviet Union. Since then, many Uzbekistani musicians and dance troupes have been invited and introduced to a great number of Japanese audiences. Please share your thoughts on Min-On's cultural exchange programs.

Ambassador: I deeply admire the last 50 years of contributions by the Min-On Concert Association. Thousands of musicians and performing artists from around the world have been introduced onstage in Japan, promoting international cultural exchange and mutual understanding. In particular, I was

work, promoting the global exchange of musical culture through inviting and dispatching musicians and artists worldwide. You have fulfilled the very significant mission of deepening mutual understanding and strengthening friendly relations amongst people of the world.



The 2015 "Sharq Taronalari" music festival held at Registan Square in the ancient city of Samarkand

greatly inspired to hear about Uzbek artists being invited to Japan by Min-On in the era of the former Soviet Union, in 1976.

This is solid proof that the world of music is borderless, and even if there is a great wall standing between countries, the power of music will overcome it. I believe your association has accomplished highly valuable

that area. I strongly hope, working together with the Min-On Concert Association, that we can introduce the diverse cultures of Uzbekistan to more Japanese audiences. Your association's activities are very important and beneficial to the whole world. I look forward to the further achievements and success of the Min-On Concert Association.

From the Editor

- » Idan Raichel described his music as "world music representing the diverse cultures of my homeland Israel," and the Idan Raichel Project certainly delivers a diverse blend of world culture in harmony through their performance. Min-On has always believed in this principle: "Creating harmony amidst diversity is a fundamental issue of the 21st century. While celebrating the unique characteristics of different peoples and cultures, we have to create solidarity on the level of our common humanity, our common life. Without such solidarity, there will be no future for the human race. Diversity should not beget conflict in the world, but richness."
- » During our interview with Ambassador Farrukh Tursunov from the Republic of Uzbekistan, he spoke of the significance of peaceful cultural developments in Uzbekistan as a country situated at the crossroads of the historical Silk Road. That reminds us of Min-On founder Dr. Daisaku Ikeda's speech entitled *A New*

Road to East-West Cultural Exchange delivered at Moscow State University in 1975. An excerpt reads, "Individuals with a global view of the human condition agree that the best way to unite the hearts and minds of all people is through cultural networking on the broadest possible basis. In my travels I have heard people everywhere speak of their desire for East-West cultural interchange. At no time in history has there been as great a need for a spiritual Silk Road extending all over the globe, transcending national and ideological barriers, and binding together peoples at the most basic level. Cultural interactions that are a spontaneous manifestation of the popular will can turn suspicion into trust, convert hostility into understanding, and lead the world away from strife toward lasting peace." Two years later in 1977, as a step toward realizing this spiritual Silk Road mentioned in the speech, Min-On dispatched the Silk Road Research Teams, and based on the results, initiated the *A Musical Voyage Along the Silk Road* series.

From the Min-On Music Museum Collection



“Classical Orchestra” - 1885, Switzerland

The mechanism of this music box is originally derived from that of carillons, or bell chimes, used in church clock towers in Switzerland and other countries from the 16th century. Later, in the 1830s, this cylindrical music box was invented independently from the clock towers.

This “Classical Orchestra” is a cylindrical music box manufactured in 1885 by Nicole Freres in Switzerland. The compact and beautiful instrument features a bell rung by a silver arm, a drum struck by eight gold-colored drumsticks and castanets clicked by six rods.

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!

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Exhibit and Shop

Open: 11:00–16:00 (Tuesday–Saturday)
10:00–17:00 (Sunday & public holidays)

Closed: Every Monday (If Monday is a public holiday, next day is closed)

Music Library

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

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



Newsletter Published by: Min-On Concert Association, Public Relations and Publicity **E-mail:** publicrelations@min-on.or.jp

Publisher: Kazuto Ito, Yoshihiko Kudo **Editor:** Eugene Hirahara **Publishing Staff:** Maki Horie **Photography:** Min-On Staff Photographers

Art Direction, Design & Editorial Assistance by Modis Design Printed in Japan by King Printers.

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