

Detroit Symphony wins new fans in Toyota City

(This is the second of two articles by Detroit Symphony principal flutist Ervin Monro on the symphony's recent trip to Japan.)

BY ERVIN MONRO
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DETROIT SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Last week, as part of our "Northwest Airlines Friendship Tour to Japan," the Detroit Symphony Orchestra traveled to Toyota City, Japan, sister city of Detroit, to play concerts for the celebration of the opening of the new Toyota City Concert Hall. The DSO also performed six concerts for local school children as part of an educational exchange.

The new concert hall in Toyota City is part of a large new city building and is surprisingly located on the tenth floor of the structure. Concert-goers can stroll through adjacent lobbies and get a view of the entire city.

This building is rather unique because it also houses the city library and drama theater as well as city offices. The hall itself is rather small, with around 1,000 seats as compared to our 2,000-seat Orchestra Hall - yet quite attractive and adorned with light woodwork.

Hanging from the lofty ceiling are two rows of conical shaped chandeliers that have flying

sails. The dressing facilities are on the ninth floor, complete with heated toilet seats (no kidding). The sound of the hall is very live, and a bit brighter than our own Orchestra Hall. The orchestra had to adjust its dynamic level for the smaller surroundings.

For the educational concerts, the Japanese school children dress uniformly in white and black, with white tennis shoes, and are very well behaved. I strolled through the halls, occasionally exchanging a "konnichiwa" (hello) with the curious but friendly students.

We will give five educational concerts in total, and part of our concert presentation is to have each section demonstrate their instruments at different points throughout the concert.

One-upmanship

Already during the afternoon concert, various sections were beginning to embellish their demonstrations in an effort to do a one-upmanship on their colleagues. New material became more and more creative with each rendering. One brass section presented excerpts from Star Wars. The students loved the lively demonstrations and the DSO musicians were also amused by the unexpected offerings.

The next day, there was a special presentation and party in the evening. Our music director, Neeme Järvi, had arrived in town accompanied by Detroit's Mayor Dennis Archer.

There were many, many speeches. Mayor Archer made us proud with his usual inspirational address, and it has been a delight to all of us that he has supported us on our recent tour.

The food and entertainment thereafter was truly splendid. Our own brass quintet performed several selections, followed by Japanese folk dancers and then a Kabuki dance presentation. The banquet was deliciously prepared, with many sushi selections, and the presentation was so beautiful that my hunger permitted us to consume it.

In the morning we played our final educational concert. I passed Doug Carmichael of Livonia, clarinetist, in the hall and he told me of a pub we should visit following the Friday evening concert. "You'll love it, Erv," he said, "it's called 'The Detroit Connection.'"

Our members are now shopping in earnest, and we find it's not always an easy task because of language differences.

We have learned to seek out

help from our only Japanese-speaking staff member, a student intern from the University of Michigan whose name is Mami Kato. Her first name is Mami, "mommy," which is most appropriate. It's interesting to hear so much adults asking, "Where is Mommy? I need Mommy!"

Our Friday evening concert, our first evening concert of the tour, was a big success, and we played two encores. Two lovely young Japanese girls in traditional kimonos presented bouquets to Maestro Järvi and our Concertmaster, Emmanuelle Boissert.

On our last day in Toyota City, my colleagues collected a few mementoes.

Made in Japan?

There is a hot new product here - a non-dairy creamer, which has been advertised heavily on CNN. The ads are apparently effective, as several of our members bought packages of "Crap" to take back home to the USA.

Our matinee concert went well and was followed by another reception. Again, there were many, many speeches, followed eventually by a friendship celebration.

On Sunday, Nov. 22, we travel

to the city of Otsu, which is located in the sister province of Michigan. It is a holiday weekend here in Japan, something similar to our Labor Day weekend, and the traffic is very heavy.

Our schedule called for a 2-1/2-hour bus trip, but it takes five hours. We have a Japanese hostess on the bus who speaks as much English as we speak Japanese.

Over the river

Toward the end of the trip, she sang a Japanese folksong about the river we would soon be seeing. It was a pretty melody, with many, many verses.

Shortly thereafter, we were again snarled in traffic, and I jokingly hummed back part of her song. She told the Japanese representative from Toyota City that she was surprised I had learned the melody so quickly.

"These are musicians," he explained. She then wanted us all to hum the melody, so the entire bus rendered a heartfelt chorus for her enjoyment. It was only when she insisted we learn the Japanese verses that the group failed miserably.

The city of Otsu is very beautiful. It lies on the edge of Japan's largest lake, called Lake Biwa. A "Biwa" is a Chinese guitar-like

instrument and the large lake, which is 140 miles in circumference, is shaped like a Biwa.

The Biwako Hotel is very new and world class. Because land in Japan is at such a high premium, the entire hotel and its wondrous gardens were built on land reclaimed.

So my wife, Susan, and I lucked out and got a room overlooking the lake and the adjoining background mountains. It is a spectacular place to spend our last nights of the Friendship Tour.

For our final concert of the tour, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra performed the music of Mozart and Mahler, inaugurating the also brand new Biwako Hall.

This hall is very impressive, very large and modern. Japanese audiences are extremely quiet during the performance, but very appreciative when it comes time for applause.

As the tour wound down, the members of the DSO wandered the streets of Otsu, enjoying the strange scenery, the friendliness of the people and the exotic cuisine.

We have had many interesting experiences on this tour, but will also be glad come home to our own Orchestra Hall.

ART BEAT

Send items for consideration in Art Beat to Frank Provenzano, arts reporter for the Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers. He can be reached at (248) 901-2557, or at frankprovenzano@home.com.

Or write to: The Eccentric! Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48009.

DETROIT CHAMBER WINDS

RELEASES CD

"Holiday Brass," a collection of traditional holiday carols, has been recently released by the Detroit Chamber Winds.

The CD features metro Detroit's brass players in performances conducted by H. Robert Reynolds. The recordings were made over several days at Detroit's Orchestra Hall.

"Holiday Brass" is available throughout metro Detroit at Arbor Drug, Dearborn Music, English Gardens, Farmer Jack, harmony House and Target.

For more information, (248) 362-9529.

FALL SEASON AT SYBARIS

GALLERY

Three shows are featured at Sybaris Gallery through December.

The sculpture of Myra Minitich Gray is featured in the main gallery space.

Gray received her MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1986. She is currently professor



Featured artist: The Cranbrook Music Guild showcases Scott Piper, lyric tenor, at its upcoming concert.

of metals at the State University of New York at New Paltz.

Her hand-wrought metalwork has been characterized as "exaggerated constructions...and a return to a more traditional format."

Meanwhile, the innovative teapot of Philip Cornelius, and the evocative jewelry of Susan

Kingsley are exhibited in the second gallery at Sybaris.

For more information, call (248) 544-3388. Or visit Sybaris Gallery, 202 E. Third Street, Royal Oak.

CRANBROOK MUSIC GUILD

Cranbrook Music Guild presents its third concert of the season 8 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 8, at Cranbrook House, 380 Low Pine Road (northwest corner of Cranbrook Road). Tickets are \$25, available at the door 10 minutes prior to the concert, call (810) 751-2435. All concerts conclude with the traditional Oak Room champagne afterward where audience members can meet our artists and greet each other.

Scott Piper, lyric tenor, will present a recital of songs and arias with Michelle Beaton, piano and Kathryn Hart, lyric soprano.

The program will feature works from Italian, Spanish, French, German and English vocal literature. A highlight will be "Sonnets from Petrarch" by Liszt.

Winner of the 1998 Paul Robeson Centennial Performing Arts Award, Piper is also the recipient of numerous prestigious local and national awards and prizes. He has appeared in roles with the Michigan Opera Theatre, Opera Pacific, and with San

Francisco Opera's Western Opera Theater National Tour where he performed to wide acclaim as Alfredo in Verdi's "La Traviata."

As a frequent recital and concert soloist, he has appeared in over 130 performances with orchestras including the Grand Rapids Symphony and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

MICHIGAN CLASSIC BALLET

Michigan Classic Ballet Company of Bloomfield Hills has been invited to represent the U.S. at the Tanz-summer Festival of Performing Arts in Innsbruck, Austria June 15-25, 1999.

The annual festival gives chosen pre-professional ballet companies the opportunity to perform and study in a European environment.


Mannheim Steamroller presents holiday ice show

(PittNewsWire) - Mannheim Steamroller's creator, Chip Davis, has taken his artistry one step further. By combining the innovative holiday music of Mannheim Steamroller and the breathtaking talents of Olympic and World skating Champions, he has created a unique holiday ice show entitled "The Christmas Angel."

Described as "the most extravagant live skating show ever staged," The Christmas Angel will delight Detroit audiences for one performance only when it heads to the Joe Louis Arena 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 19.

Tickets (\$50 Gold Circle seats, \$35 & \$20) for Mannheim Steamroller's "The Christmas Angel" can be purchased at the Joe Louis Arena and Fox Theatre box offices and all Ticketmaster locations, including Hudson's, Harmony House, and Repeat the Beat.

To charge by phone, call (248) 645-6666 or on-line at www.ticketmaster.com. To purchase group tickets (20 or more) call (313) 471-3099. For further information contact Olympia Entertainment guest information at (313) 983-6606.



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