

Beautiful Music Together

By Kunio Yanagida

In a small town in central West Germany there is a basic research institute staffed not only by Germans but also by Americans, Japanese, Czechs and other scientists from around the world.

One evening, Dr. M., a German scientist, invited his co-workers and their spouses to his home for a party. Soon after everyone had arrived, Dr. M. took it upon himself to do the introductions. He began with Dr. F. from Czechoslovakia.

"Dr. F. has been studying Russian and is always on the lookout for opportunities to practice the language. Not long ago, for example, he had the chance to talk with a famous Russian conductor who was touring Czechoslovakia. 'Here is my chance,' he thought 'to show off my Russian.' But after greeting him with a speech in Russian, Dr. F. was crushed to hear the conductor say that he had always heard Czech was a difficult language, but..."

Mastering a foreign language is not an easy task for anyone, and much of the humor in situations such as this derives from our own anxiety and ability to sympathize. At the same time, the language joke only goes over among people who readily acknowledge the inconvenience of having to deal with different languages yet who strive to understand and get closer to each other. Such people are seeking to overcome the babble of language to achieve human harmony.

Another quest for harmony is to be found in music. Last autumn, Seiji Ozawa, music director and conductor for the Boston Symphony Orchestra, made a special trip back to his native land to conduct a concert with the New Japan Philharmonic and world-famous American soprano Jessye Norman. At the concert, Jessye Norman's rich, strong voice enveloped us with the music of Wagner and Richard Strauss.

After the concert, I had the pleasure

of visiting Ozawa in his dressing room for a radio interview. I was particularly interested in how two such strong personalities had managed to coordinate their performances so well.

Ozawa replied, "I spend a great deal of time before a concert talking and practicing with the vocal or instrumental soloist. We talk about different things, depending upon the soloist's personality.

"For example, there is one very serious and dedicated pianist who tells me there are two possible ways of playing a certain particular passage and asks which I prefer. We go through the whole concert like this, and it ends up very much like a study session. But we get to know each other very well."

As for working with Jessye Norman, Ozawa says, "She has a special way of breathing, taking long, slow, deep breaths to fill her lungs before she begins to sing. This makes it more difficult to synchronize the orchestra with her singing, but I've had the pleasure of working with her for many years and know exactly when she's ready to start just by looking at her."

Ozawa's words helped to explain something I had already observed about his conducting. During Norman's singing Ozawa had turned toward her frequently wielding his baton with large, vigorous motions, for all the world as if he were about to sweep her off her feet. The result was a perfect, magical matching of orchestra and soloist.

Harmony in music is much more than the coordination of the sounds of different musical instruments and voices. Harmony is what is achieved when every performer strives as part of a united, single entity for the best expression of a musical composition. In working toward this perfect unity, both conductor and soloist try hard to coordinate their performances while at the same time



zealously remaining true to their own individual selves.

The same must be true of people as we strive for a more harmonious world. We all have different ways of thinking and different ways of talking depending upon how our personalities have reacted with our personal and cultural backgrounds. The cultural gaps



between peoples speaking different languages are unavoidable but need not be insurmountable.

Throughout this series I have stressed the need for each of us to understand and accept our different ways of thinking and different customs. It is essential that we be aware of, understanding about and accommodating toward our different modes of expression. At the same time, we need to develop a better awareness of our many similarities. Culture is a hu-

man achievement, and the similarities, running as deep as our shared humanity, can help us harmonize our differences.

About half a year after I spoke with Seiji Ozawa, I had the pleasure of meeting with Governor Lamar Alexander of Tennessee. There are now 35 Japanese companies from a variety of industries in Tennessee, and the governor had come to Tokyo to interest more Japanese companies in his state. As part of this impressive public relations effort, Gov-

ernor Alexander distributed complimentary copies of a sumptuous book of photographs entitled *Friends—Japanese and Tennesseans*.

Expecting just another pretty coffee-table picture book, I was surprised and pleased at what I actually found. Government agencies and other official bodies tend to put out very bland materials suitable primarily for grade school children and first-time tourists, but *Friends* was not like that at all. The photographs were by Pulitzer Prize winner Robin Hood, and they were a joy to behold.

Hood spent five months in Japan looking for subjects that would correspond to similar people and places he had already photographed in Tennessee. Thus a picture of a Tennessee garden would be juxtaposed against a picture of a Japanese garden; a Tennessee church facing a Japanese temple; a Tennessee farmhouse next to a Japanese farmhouse; an old Tennessee man side by side with an old Japanese man; Tennessean children in their Sunday best across the page from Japanese children all dressed up in their holiday finery; Tennessee children eating watermelon and Japanese children eating watermelon; Tennessean miners and Japanese miners; and so on.

As a whole, the book conveys a powerful sense of the shared humanity that all of us possess despite our faces, colors, clothes and other superficial differences. Though appearances may differ, Hood seems to say, Americans and Japanese are involved in the same basic human endeavors.

Friends is the perfect illustration of the harmony that I believe can transcend the cultural gaps and gorges between us. More works of this kind would do much to increase our sensitivity to our similarities, our common humanity and the fact that we are all fellow passengers aboard this planet earth. ●

(This is the last of six parts.)