

# Appetite for Music

By Hiroyuki Iwaki

There are nine symphony orchestras in Tokyo at present, probably the largest concentration of professional orchestras in any city anywhere in the world. Of course, Tokyo is a big city, and its population of 12 million would qualify it as a medium-sized country in Europe, but Tokyo still has far more orchestras than such major metropolises as New York or London.

Complementing the resident orchestras, Tokyo also plays host to the leading American and European orchestras on tour throughout the year. World-class orchestras that have visited Tokyo recently include those from New York's Metropolitan Opera, the Viennese and Berlin state operas, La Scala in Milan, the Bolshoi Opera Studio in Moscow and Bayreuth's Festspielhaus. In terms of the number of concerts, operas and ballet performances, Tokyo is surely an international center for music.

## Tilted toward Tokyo

But when one gets outside of Tokyo, the rest of Japan stands in glaring contrast. Osaka, Japan's second-largest city, has a long and strong musical tradition, and is famous for its international festivals. Yet it has only two symphony orchestras for its six million people. This is a far greater disparity than the economic disparity between Tokyo and Osaka.

Of course, I do not mean to imply that one can judge how cultured a city is by the number of orchestras it supports—and I would be the first to agree that there are too many orchestras in Tokyo—but the disparity is striking. Outside of these two cities, there are fewer than a dozen orchestras, which means a total of only 22–23 for all of Japan.

West Germany has a population of about 50 million and over 110 orchestras, and East Germany a population of 27 million and 98 orchestras. Of course, Germany is where the orchestra was born, and it is only right that East and West

Germany should be in the forefront. And I know that Japan cannot be expected to equal East and West Germany in this, since it is only about 110 years since Japan became serious about Western music. It is, after all, "Western" music.

Yet given that Japan is now a world economic superpower and an industrialized country with all of the trappings of Western civilization, it is unfitting for a country of 120 million to only have 22–23 orchestras. Conservatories and other schools of music in Japan turn out nearly 100,000 musicians every year. Of course, most of these are musicians in name only, but they still include a goodly number of very competent people.

Several years ago, somebody did a survey and found that Japanese musicians total about 5% of the orchestra musicians in West Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the other German-speaking countries. And of course there are also Japanese musicians working in English-speaking countries, French-speaking countries and elsewhere overseas. In fact, the total number of Japanese musicians working outside of Japan is probably a very large number. And most of them are very good musicians.

This is a phenomenon that started in the 1960s. In the late 1950s, a member of an orchestra that I was conducting auditioned for a position with the world-famous Berlin Philharmonic, and I remember how happy and proud we all were of him when he got the appointment. There were scattered incidents like this for several years. Coming from a musically backward country, we were all very pleased when one of our colleagues got a job with one of the leading European or American orchestras. After a while, this became an everyday occurrence, and now there are even people who bemoan the "music drain."

I do not think of it as a drain. People should be free to work wherever they want to, and I can understand how any musician would want to play with the best

possible orchestra no matter where it was.

But things are not all a bed of roses for the Japanese musicians playing with European or American orchestras. Many of these people are working overseas not because they want to but because there were no positions open for them in Japan. And some of them are people who went to Europe as students full of enthusiasm when they were young, thinking they would develop their talents, play for several years with a world-class orchestra, and then return to Japan for the crowning years of their careers.

## Longing to return

They have raised the children and now it is time to go home, but there are no positions open in Japan. Longing for home, they live sad and lonely lives in an alien land. This is neither a happy nor a healthy situation, either for them or for the orchestras that they play with.

Of course, it is not only Japanese who long for home. Yet in my travels worldwide, I have noticed this is more prominent among Japanese. While this is not the place to debate the whys and wherefores, and whether or not it is because Japan was closed to the outside world for so long, I would like simply to go on record here as being in disagreement with the flood of Japanese writings on the Japanese personality and their proclivity to see everything as uniquely Japanese because of unique Japanese circumstances.

Still, there are a lot of Japanese who wish they could play in Japan, and I have long felt that one solution to this situation would be to have more orchestras in Japan. I realize that nine is too many orchestras to have in Tokyo, but it is also a



fact that this monster metropolis has an insatiable appetite for music.

For starters, it would be a good idea to establish orchestras in all of the Japanese prefectural capitals. Tokyo already has nine. Hokkaido's capital of Sapporo has a major orchestra in the Sapporo Symphony Orchestra. Osaka, Kyoto, Nagoya, Fukuoka and a number of other leading cities also have orchestras, but there are many that do not. If we made sure each prefectural capital had at least one orchestra, it would bring the Japanese total up to 50-60. This is still a far cry from West Germany's 110 or East Germany's 98, but it is a start.

Even though I have a lifetime post as permanent conductor of the NHK Symphony Orchestra, the closest thing Japan has to a national orchestra, I have been very active in promoting the establishment and fostering of orchestras outside of Tokyo. I was, for example, the first music director of the Nagoya Philharmonic and helped that orchestra until it was able to get on its feet professionally. For 12 years I worked as music director for the Sapporo Symphony, retiring from that post only this April. This is all part of my "guerrilla war" on behalf of creating orchestras in all of Japan's major cities.

Even in the early years when we were laboring to build the Sapporo Symphony, I already had my mind set on Kanazawa as the site for the next new orchestra. At the time, there were no professional orchestras on the Japan Sea side of Japan.

The Japanese sometimes call the Pacific side with its sunny winters "Japan's front" and the Japan Sea side with its snow-bound winters "Japan's back." Now these descriptions have disappeared from the media as a regional slur, but they re-

main in many people's minds. Anyway, Kanazawa has long been the cultural center of Japan's back—the Japan Sea side—since the days of the Edo shogunate. It is also the capital of Ishikawa Prefecture.

## Powers to persuade

I spent eight years wheedling, cajoling, and otherwise trying to persuade the people of Ishikawa that they should have a symphony orchestra in Kanazawa. Finally they relented, and the Ensemble Orchestra of Kanazawa was established this July, the first chamber music orchestra in Japan. Since I was one of the instigators, I agreed to serve as the first musical director, but my attention has already shifted to the question of how to start an orchestra on Shikoku. This island has four prefectures, but nary a single professional orchestra.

In starting up the Ensemble Orchestra of Kanazawa, we invited applications from throughout Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan and the world. Of the 270 people who applied, 70 were from Europe. The Japanese media made a big thing of the fact that all these foreigners were applying for a position with a brand-new orchestra in an outlying city on the edge of the Asian continent, but the applications came as no surprise to me.

With the development of modern transportation and the ability of satellites to broadcast news worldwide instantaneously, the world has become a much smaller place and all of our countries are now next-door neighbors. Just as there is nothing strange about a German musician playing for a French orchestra or a French musician taking a job in Italy, these people decided that they wanted to look for work in Japan. The reverse is already true—witness the large number of Japanese musicians playing with foreign orchestras—and it should come as no surprise that foreign musicians want to play in Japan. In fact, I was gratified, because it seemed to symbolize to me that Japan was finally approaching musical parity with Europe.

At first, the prefectural authorities asked me to restrict the orchestra's membership to people from Ishikawa, with

priority on people who lived in Kanazawa. I flat-out refused and insisted that the selection process be impartial and open to all. "How many native Berliners do you think there are in the Berlin Philharmonic? None. But the fact that Berlin has a world-class orchestra creates culture for all the people of Berlin."

We finally settled on a formula whereby we would take Ishikawa Prefecture residents over other Japanese and other Japanese over non-Japanese "all else being equal," but would opt for the most qualified candidate for each position whenever there were any differences in ability.

Even so, one of the national papers reported that there had been so many applications from overseas that the prefectural authorities had decided to limit non-Japanese musicians to no more than 50% of the orchestra. Since I was supposed to be the orchestra's musical director, and since I had no recollection of ever having agreed to any such thing—and indeed I found it completely contrary to everything I had argued for—I lodged the strongest possible protest with the prefectural authorities. On investigation, it turned out that the story was based on a misunderstanding by a local stringer.

So the story ends happily, but I would like to continue this discussion in my next essay, with a look at some of the more intractable notions that the Japanese have about people from other countries. ■

(This is the fifth of six essays by Mr. Iwaki.)

*Hiroyuki Iwaki is a leading Japanese conductor who made his international debut with the NHK Symphony Orchestra in its world tour in 1960. He is now the orchestra's chief conductor for life as well as being chief conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. He has also appeared with other leading orchestras including the Berlin, Vienna, Leningrad and Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestras. He is a noted interpreter of 20th century music.*