

Encounter with the Orchestra

I had my first meeting with the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra when it was still called the Nagoya City Orchestra. I conducted a concerto with a well-known pianist, Mr. Shura Cherkassky. Several years later, I received and accepted an invitation to conduct its regular concert. The program was Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* and Richard Strauss' *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. We had rigorous rehearsals together. On the day of the concert, Mr. Nonoyama, the Secretary General, asked me to accept the post of its resident conductor. I was shocked because it was such short notice. I told him that I needed some time to process, and I began thinking of a variety of things about the offer.

The reason why I accepted the position was that, of course, I was a native to Nagoya. I had an earnest desire to make the city's music culture more active. I also liked the small size of the orchestra and the fact that it often had opera and ballet concerts. I like French compositions, especially compositions written for a small unit orchestra by Ibert, Milhaud and Poulenc, and I have often selected and played them. Truly, conducting a big unit orchestra is a real pleasure as a conductor, but compositions for a chamber orchestra are written neatly, and I love the fact that each voice part can be heard separately.

I decided to accept the offer in order to plan various interesting projects. At first, in 1998, I was given the title as guest resident conductor. Then my career as its regular resident conductor began in the following year, 1999. From that year, the orchestra, which had been mainly performing German compositions such as Beethoven and Brahms, also began performing compositions new to the orchestra. It must have been a season of refreshment, but also a very hard season for the members of the orchestra, because they had to handle so many new things. Favorably, the ages of the members were young and they were eager to grow. When they worked on a new composition, they never left untouched what they did not understand or what was done poorly as an ensemble. They kept working on the section during their rehearsal breaks, or sought me to solve the problem together. I had never seen such a willing and positive orchestra. The Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra would spend three days rehearsing rigorously a composition that other orchestras would complete in one

day. They did not mind it, as long as the concert was done well. Together with this Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra, I grew to be a patient conductor.

The orchestra held its regular concerts five times. I chose all the programs for each concert. As a brand new challenge, I included many French music pieces in a concert program. It was actually a risky adventure. Some of these compositions included solo passages that members would play. It was not easy for the members to play solo parts. The soloists would stand out and feel great pressure. But, at the same time, it offered a moment of being proud of themselves, if it was done well. So I took the risk. And the members responded by rehearsing rigorously.

Nothing But New

For the first regular concert with the orchestra, I chose *Ma mère l'Oye*, the orchestral suite by Ravel, a French composer, *Piano Concerto* by another French, Poulenc, and Mozart's *Symphony No. 40*. Ravel's composition was performed with a small orchestral unit. Perhaps the critics did not expect the orchestra to perform successfully with such a program, but we performed these compositions with better feeling than we had expected. It was very French. The sounds of French music are subtle and difficult, but unlike ones who had already been thickened and solidified by certain types of color, the members of the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra were flexible enough to make their sounds French. I asked Mr. Koji Oikawa to be the pianist for the Poulenc's piano concerto. When Mr. Oikawa and I performed together previously, he told me that he liked this piano concerto but he had never performed it before. I really wanted him to be a part of this performance. Passages for the orchestra were extremely difficult, so we spent considerable time practicing until we expressed the depths of this composition well.

Mozart's symphony was a perfect fit for the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra. I intended to play several compositions of Mozart during my tenure position, and the 40th symphony was perfect for sharpening the orchestra's ensemble. The tickets for the concert were sold out. It was a good start. Everyone must have been interested in what sounds the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra would be evolving into. Even today, the orchestra still creates bright and colorful sounds.

On that year, I appeared on the NHK television show, *Yōkoso Senpai*, and another concert was to be televised on another NHK television program. In this concert, Mr. Nobuya Sugawa, a saxophonist, performed a concerto with us. I also played the piano on *La Création du Monde* composed by Milhaud.

I wanted only to do new pieces with the orchestra. I also had to. In opera, for example, playing an opera in a normal way was not intriguing. I thought about performing on a Noh stage. I explored various possibilities. In between concerts and rehearsals in Nagoya, I would walk around and search for ideas. One day, I visited the Atsuta Shrine in Nagoya and talked with the office

staff to see if we could hold an unusual event together. The Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra had a positive attitude about accepting ideas that were novel. It allowed these unique ideas to be considered as long as it would please the audience.

Finally, various adventures and experiments with the orchestra began.

Yōkoso Senpai

It was confirmed that I would be appearing in the NHK television program, *Extracurricular Activity: Yōkoso Senpai* (Welcome, Alumni). In the month of July 1999, when I officially became the resident conductor of the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra, I visited Taisei Elementary School where I had attended as a child, located in Nagoya, my hometown. This television program is interesting. In the program, people who are active in various professional fields visit schools they had attended and are assigned to teach the school children. I was assigned to teach a music class at the elementary school for two days. I wanted to show the children what kinds of things I do and how I enjoy music as a conductor.

Before going to the school, I had requested the photos of all the students I would be teaching so that I could remember each by name. I knew it would be convenient to know their names when I met them, and would be useful for communication. As a matter of fact, the students were surprised when I called them by name on the day we met each other for the first time.

On the first day, I spoke to the children about how to conduct and how to communicate what I want to express to other people. They were sixth graders, but they quickly understood the basics of conducting that I usually have to teach in my university course. Perhaps that was because they were interested. They had their own ideas and asked me questions immediately when they did not understand. Our class was very lively.

On the second day, the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra visited the school and we had the students actually conduct with the orchestra. This orchestra performs many concerts for elementary and junior high schools for music education. It regularly gives lessons and teaches music that children can understand. The members are also cooperative. During the time of planning, we picked up a well-known tune, *Do-Re-Mi*, and we decided to divide the children into three groups, and have each group play the tune with a different way of expression. One group, “Do-Re-Mi of Four Seasons,” would make music with each of the four seasons throughout the year. Another group, “Do-Re-Mi of Animals,” would include the sounds of various animals in the music. The other

group, “Do-Re-Mi of Railway,” would express the scenes of travelling by train like leaving from a station, going through a tunnel, and passing through a bridge.

My role was to receive requests from these children, think about what kinds of sounds they wanted (sounds of animals, or whatever would represent a season like fireworks) and write down the music scores for the orchestra. We rehearsed together with the orchestra and tried making various sounds with musical instruments. For example, we compared the sounds between an oboe and a triangle to express the sound of a cricket chirping. Indeed, so many different kinds of sounds came out of the orchestra. The members of the orchestra had an unusual experience. They must have enjoyed playing sounds, rather than music notes written on scores.

At the end, we had a concert in the school gym. The children took charge of conducting the orchestra throughout the concert. They conducted well to the rhythm of the music. It was also a moment for the adults to revisit their childlike innocence and simplicity.

Performing Opera *Don Giovanni* in a form of Noh & Kyōgen

Out of nowhere, a white Noh mask shining cold appeared in front of my eyes. I was conducting the opera *Don Giovanni* by Mozart in May, 1995. It appeared as a flash, right at the moment when I finished conducting the intense music for the scene when the statue of the Knight Commander arrived in the palace for revenge and was about to sing. Instantly I had the idea to produce *Don Giovanni* in the form of Noh&Kyōgen. My thoughts continued. How about performing the opera at a Noh stage instead of a stage theater? The Noh stage by itself would function as a remarkable set. Then, we would not need large stage settings.

Don Giovanni is an opera based on a legend from the 15th century Europe, Don Juan. Back then, Japan was in the Muromachi Era when Noh was developed as an art form by Kan'ami and Zeami. What would it be like if the story of *Don Giovanni* was re-told as a Japanese story? Suppose we made this man, who had numerous infidelities with women and ended up being carried down to the hell by demons, as an extremely licentious Japanese samurai. Then what would be the figure of the statue of the Knight Commander who would be at the scene when he comes to revenge? My friends, with whom I talked about the production idea, were intrigued. So, *Don Giovanni* in a form of Noh&Kyōgen began to occupy my head. I visited the office of the National Noh Theater in Sendagaya, Tokyo, to see if it was possible to perform an opera at the theater. Their response was, "No(h)." The theater could be only used for Noh or Kyōgen performances. A certain number of seats would have to be provided for a performance and, tickets for those seats would have to be sold to make a profit. Unfortunately, most of the Noh theaters had a very small number of seats. So I spent the next five years waiting for the right chance to come. During those years, a magnificent Noh theater was built in Nagoya. The theater held 630 seats and could be used for an opera as well. After the theater was built, I became the resident conductor of the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra, a professional orchestra active in the city. The wind began turning to Nagoya.

Finally in 2000, *Don Giovanni*, directed in a Noh&Kyōgen form was going to be performed. I consulted Mr. Sennojō Shigeyama, a Kyōgen actor, about directing the performance. I had previously worked with Mr. Shigeyama when

we performed Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* dramatized as Kyōgen. He pleasantly accepted his role to direct *Don Giovanni*.

When it came to this production, I encountered several immediate problems. The lyrics of the opera were the first problem. Originally the lyrics were written in Italian, and I thought first that it would be more suitable to translate them into Japanese for an opera that would be directed in a Japanese form. But that might cause a gap between the movements and the words of the opera singers who act, especially when the singers are acting with slow movements. After thinking through various considerations, I concluded that it would be better to honor Mozart's music as is. So I decided to perform it with the original Italian language.

Conductor Wearing *Kimono* with *Tasuki*

The next issue to deal with was where to place the orchestra in the theater. There is no orchestra pit in a Noh theater, so we had to create a space for a smaller orchestra in the area between the stage and the seats, called *shirasu*. I would be sitting on the front seat and facing the stage to conduct the orchestra, but the pillars supporting the roof blocked my view of some of the orchestra members. I wouldn't be able to see or communicate with them during the performance. In order to avoid such a situation, we set up a television monitor so that the musicians sitting behind the pillars could watch the conductor from the monitor.

Another problem was whether or not to use a mandolin instrument during the performance. I had thought about using a *biwa* lute for a mandolin to match the historical context, but had had a huge misunderstanding. There is a scene where Don Giovanni serenades a woman at a window with his mandolin from below. I had assumed that, since the *biwa* was the same stringed instrument as the mandolin, it would be easy to play the melody that was written for the mandolin. I was told that it was not, and was actually impossible to play a bright major scale with the *biwa*. So, we decided to play the instrument solo after all.

Having dealt with various issues and problems, we managed to perform the opera in June, 2000. All the seats during the four show days were sold out. So we put the extra seats on sale and they were also sold out. The production was a GREAT success. When you gazed at the Japanese actors wearing *kimonos* and acting on the Noh stage...they looked amazing! They were beautiful. The Japanese could imitate Westerner's behaviors and act as such, even though, after all, those behaviors are products from foreign nations. On the Noh stage we created as many expressions as possible with one plain screen and one stage prop, a fan.

Mr. Shigeyama, who directed the opera, said, "The less concrete settings a drama has, the more imagination it gives to the viewers, which creates a great performance." I did not see any mismatch between the music of Mozart and the form of Noh&Kyōgen, and the performance was absolutely wonderful. It was interesting to see how a minuet in the opera would be expressed through the

traditional Japanese dance with a fan. A minuet is a dance in three-fourths time, while most of the traditional Japanese dances are in two-fourths or four-fourths time. He settled the issue in a simple and clear way: there would be no problem after the three-fourths minuet was repeated four times. He was exactly right, for the conflict disappeared when we grasped it in a larger phrase. And it gave me a real surprise to see the minuet danced with a fan.

At the climax of the drama, the ghost of the Knight Commander appeared and walked slowly through the *hashi gakari*, a raised platform, to the main stage with his white hair streaming. That was a spectacle with tremendous power. There was no great distance between the main stage and the seats at the Noh theatre. So, the expressions of the singers were distinctly visible to the spectators, and the singers were able to make their voices resound without forcing it. The project that I had dreamed about for five years finally came true, and it was worth the wait.

In this performance, all the singers performed while wearing *kimono* dresses. Mr. Shigeyama suggested that I should also wear a *kimono* as the conductor. I had played the piano before in a *kimono*, but not as a conductor. He also gave me the advice to tuck up the *kimono* sleeves with a *tasuki* cord. I started practicing this *tasuki-gake* every night in a hotel, using a *yukata* cord. On the first day of the performance, after greeting the audience with my *kimono* and *hakama*, I sat down and began *tasuki-gake*, which was the most nervous moment that I had during the entire performance. But when I heard the audience responding with applause, I was ready. I swung the baton down and began conducting.

Masque—Manipulated by the Mask

Then, the devil whispered to me, “The future will be yours, once you wear the mask, called Desire...” This was the catchword for a concert performed at the Nagoya Artpia Hall on October 2002. I produced this concert with the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra, collaborating orchestral and ballet performances. However, the main focus was not a ballet performance on the stage. The orchestral concert was the main event. So, the orchestra still performed on the stage, rather than in the concert pit below the stage, and the ballet performance was also added on the orchestral concert. Stravinsky’s *The Soldier’s Tale*, and *Pulcinella* were chosen as the music program for the concert. I picked these two works because both compositions were difficult for the musicians to perform, and also because it was hard to imagine the scenes of each story with music alone.

Pulcinella is a masked character, appearing in the Italian comedy of improvisation style. He is also a handsome man. From this mask, I had an idea of using another mask from *The Soldier’s Tale*. The devil appears in the story of *The Soldier’s Tale*, and the conversation between the devil and the soldier is interesting. And at the end of the story the devil wins. I gave it a try, writing a script to replace the soldier with a violinist. The original story begins when the soldier exchanges his favorite violin with the devil’s book that contains future events. I replaced it with the violinist’s desire. Having gained the violin spelled by the devil, the violinist gains honor, wealth and everything he desired. One day in a town, he hears news that the king’s daughter is sick. He visits the Palace and heals her sickness by playing the violin. Then he decides to live a happy life with the princess, which plays into the devil’s hands.

Here, in *Masque*, the mask becomes story line: by wearing the mask, the violinist can gain whatever he desires. Because all things are “the tricks of the mask,” it appears from the very start of the performance. More correctly, *Masque* has been illuminated on the stage before the concert starts. And the mask that has tricked the violinist in *The Soldier’s Tale* is then passed to the hands of *Pulcinella*, who appears in the next play. Having the mask on his face, he can act as a handsome man.

The purpose for this production was to integrate drama, ballet and music on the stage. I wanted to make sure that these three elements were weighted equally. When I produce something, I always think of the finished form of the concert first. In other words, I imagine the completed performance on the stage before anything else. Then, I carefully examine whether the characters and highlights in the play would appeal to the audience's interests.

And then, most important of all, I believe the concert flier has to catch the eyes of the people. I am very picky about fliers for a concert. Many times I have been involved in producing a concert. So I also take a part in the team designing flyers for the concert. This is because the flyer is the first message to the public from its producer.

For this concert, I chose the colors in the flyer out of my image of the context of the concert. The devil is involved in the story of *Masque*. Two shapes which oppose one another make us imagine a mask. The background color is black, while blue and red not only represent a contrast, but also express love between a man and a woman embracing. I asked the designer to design a flyer based on such content. I also asked the designer to try various shapes of the eyes in blue and red patterns and find the sharpest one. A quite noticeable flyer came out as a result, and I was very satisfied with its design. But afterwards, I received feedback that I had not expected, "I thought the flyer was for a ballet concert or some kind of performing arts. I did not think it was an orchestral concert and so I did not pay any attention to it."

It was my mistake that I had put too much emphasis on color and design, and not on the program of the concert which was the most important message. In addition, the concert hall we used had usually been used for ballet and performing arts events. Obviously the flyer that we made did not function as it should have, and this was a good lesson for us in making later flyers.

Nevertheless, we had success in the concert. Having not been able to write the script for *The Solder's Tale* early for the performers created a great inconvenience for them. I am thankful for Ms. Reiko Matsuoka who kindly accepted her role to choreograph the compositions for the ballet, and the Reiko Matsuoka Ballet which performed on the stage prettily. They performed

Stravinsky's complicated rhythm and beat smoothly. Mr. Masahiro Hibino, who accepted the role as the narrator in *The Soldier's Tale*, acted as if he were one of the characters in the story as he narrated. The concert began with Mr. Hibino's one word, "Mask!" Both the audience and I must have had the sense of being drawn into the mask's trick. I was completely charmed by his voice.

The theme of *The Soldier's Tale* is, "You already have all happiness when you have one. Don't seek two at a time." The soldier in the story tried to gain as much happiness as he could, lost a bet with the devil, and ended up losing everything. This can be a common tale in our own lives.

A friend of mine and I talked about this once. As a conductor, I receive lots of applause from many people when I am on the stage. In other words, I have already received lots of happiness on stage. Perhaps I should not pursue another happiness in my daily life off the stage. I should receive my happiness only on the stage as a conductor. That is because we have all the happiness when we have one, and the stage and conducting is my one.

Another Romance of Carmen

In 2004 the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra held a concert in Tokyo. It would be participating in a music festival with orchestras from regional cities. The organizers of the festival requested each orchestra to demonstrate locality in the program. Mr. Nonoyama, the Secretary General of the orchestra, and I discussed what would represent the local color of Nagoya. Nagoya is well known as the City of Arts, and the practice of traditional Japanese arts such as *shamisen*, *koto* and *buyō* are very popular. So we thought that we should plan a project that would integrate western music and traditional Japanese arts, such as the concerts and operas that I had produced, including *Don Giovanni* at the *Noh* theatre. Then, *bunraku*, a traditional Japanese puppet theatre, occurred to my mind. Speaking of *bunraku*, Monzaemon Chikamatsu was the greatest *jōruri* writer and his *sewamono* plays, based on conflicted love romance, are very amusing. Immediately this brought *Carmen*, an opera, to my mind. Though the last confrontation between José and Carmen, which is the climax scene of the opera, would not lead to a double suicide which usually happens at the end of a *sewamono* story, the situation between José and Carmen seemed to share something in common with the *jōruri* world.

Right away I looked into the history of *bunraku* as well as Bizet's opera, *Carmen*. The story of the opera is set in a town, called Sevilla, in Spain around the year of 1800. Coincidentally, the *jōruri* stories were popular in our nation in the Edo era. This discovery led me to envision the program. The singers would imitate the movements of puppets. In order to make them like puppets, we would place behind each singer *kuroko*, a stagehand wearing in all black, and the *kuroko* would move with the singer as if he were moving his puppet by strings. Sticking to the fact that this would be a concert, the orchestra would be performing on the stage. Another stage for the singers acting as puppets would be set up on the back of the stage. A *jōruri* narrative singer as well as a *shamisen* player would be added to the orchestra. The opera *Carman* is *opéra comique* which contains spoken lines between songs, and Guiraud, a friend of Bizet, composed the music in a way that the singers could perform as *recitative*. I had the idea that the singers would sing these lines with the *gidayū* music. Fortunately, Ms. Akiko Ota, a graduate of the Tokyo University of the Arts, majoring at musicology, was a *shamisen* player. She agreed to attempt to create the *jōruri* and *shamisen*

part for the section. In addition, Ms. Sonomi Gojō from the Gojō school of *Nihon buyō* gladly accepted the role to choreograph the program. There were so many unpredictable things in this project, but we believed we were creating a new way of appreciating operas. It would have been ideal if we could have performed the entire story of the opera, but unfortunately we had to cut out many parts of the story, because it would be performed at a concert hall, instead of an opera theater.

When it came to the flyer, I gave its designer various requests. We had made a mistake in the past (See the section of *Masque*) that because we had included so many elements in the flyer, the people did not see it as a concert but as a performance. Learning from the experience, I emphasized that it was about *Carmen*. I combined the colors of Spain's national flag (bright red and yellow) and a *bunraku* puppet. It was hard to find a puppet with a fine expression. We finally found the perfect one in the city of Chiryū in Aichi. After having photos of the puppet taken from various angles, we selected the best one. The image went far ahead of the project itself, but I was able to anticipate the outcome in advance. It was decided that the concert would be held November 20th in 2003 in Nagoya, and then in February of the following year at the Sumida Triphony Hall in Sumida, Tokyo. I was excited to see how the singers would imitate the puppets' movements.

Singers' Great Efforts in the Kimono

We began practicing for *Another Romance of Carmen*. The singers had already performed *Carmen* as an opera many times, so it did not take long for them to practice the music. Their movement during the performance, however, was rather an issue. Ms. Sonomi Gojō, the choreographer, checked their movements quite thoroughly and often sternly, and gave them specific advice.

Ms. Sonomi Gojō was active in the field of *Nihon buyō*. But she told me that she had never seen an actual performance of the opera *Carmen*. Based on the brief summary of each scene and the explanation given from the singers about how they had performed the scene in the opera, she created its dance part. She completed her choreography with each movement superb in elegance, tastefulness and sharpness. The singers also received suitable advice on how they could move in order to be seen as puppets. The people who acted as *kuroko* assisted the singers as they walked onto the stage in *kimono*. Sometimes the *kuroko* even carried the singers as if they were carrying puppets.

The singers wore casual clothes during their lessons, but when they started rehearsing in the *kimono*, the heaviness unexpectedly weighed on them. The costume and wig of Carmen were especially heavy. In addition, in the second Act in *Another Romance of Carmen*, we had a highlight scene in which Carmen's white dress would be quickly changed for another in red. Because there was no break time between the first and the second Acts, Ms. Megumi Kōno who acted Carmen had to wear two dresses from the beginning. Ms. Kōno was concerned about the tempos of the music, because she easily ran out of breath with her costume on, and had a hard time singing in fast tempos. It seemed that the place where she tightened the kimono with *obi* girdle delicately affected breathing when singing. This had not been a problem in western clothes.

In the opera sections, the singers sang without dancing, but in the narrative sections many movements were added with *gidayū* (narrative and shamisen). Tsuruzawa Sansuzu (Ms. Akiko Ota) had studied western music so I asked her to elaborate each transitional section between the *gidayū* part and the orchestral part. Without her, this project would not have been so polished. She created complete *jōruri* parts in the context of *Carmen*. The singers would

follow the *jōruri* and move as puppets, which must have been laborious for her. I also made various requests during rehearsals, such as the tones and speeds of the *gidayū* narrative songs. We were soon looking forward to rehearsing with the orchestra.

A day before the performance, all the members came together for the first time. With curious looks, the orchestra, the singers and the *gidayū* stared at one another in the concert hall. This was a rare experience for the orchestral members. Another stage had been made behind them and a *kabuki* curtain was hanging over the stage. The singers, whose faces were painted white like puppets, were doing warm-up singing in their *kimonos*. The *gidayū* and the people who were *kuroko* had never seen an actual orchestra before, and were impressed, saying that this was such an amazing experience.

The performance began with the hitting of the *hyōshigi* instrument, which had been my idea, and was followed by a short performance of the *shamisen*, and then the Prelude of the opera *Carmen* by the orchestra. Immediately after the prelude the *shamisen* and the *gidayū* came in and finally the singers appeared on the stage. I still remember the sensation I felt when we rehearsed together for the first time. Each presentation was made from the completely different art forms, but they had absolutely no sense of wrongness. I felt it strange that we were able to enter the world of orchestral music and then the *gidayū* so smoothly.

The singers sang with the original lyrics in French. We had been concerned about the lack of Japanese subtitles, but later found out that the occasional narrative singings of the *gidayū* were helpful for following the story, and that the movements of the singers were very Japanese, which allowed the audience to understand the content of the story with ease.

We enjoyed a successful performance. We received countless praises. Yet we had a critical comment that the singers did not look like puppets. I want to respond that those who want to see puppets can go to a *bunraku* theatre. It was an amusing part of the performance that the men and women, especially the opera singers, imitated the puppet movements. We received another critical comment that the music of the performance did not go beyond the Bizet's music. I defend that I had had no intention to distort his music at all. I intended to

produce an entertainment by integrating the music of Bizet and traditional Japanese culture, while fully maintaining honor to Bizet's music. I want to emphasize that the concert was an orchestral performance of music at a concert hall. The following concert in Tokyo (at the Sumida Tryphony Hall) in February 2004, brought us another success. The audience was quite responsive to our performance.

I thank Ms. Megumi Kōno (Carmen), Mr. Toyohisa Kanda (José), Ms. Kyoko Ikeda (Micaëla), Mr. Toshiya Inagaki (Escamillo) and others, because they delightfully worked with this brutal project. I thank Ms. Sonomi Gojō for having choreographed the music, and Ms. Tsuruzawa Sansuzu, the *shamisen* player, for having been a bridge maker between the East and the West. And I thank the rest of the staff for this project.

Let me share with you an interesting episode. Ms. Megumi Kōno, who acted as Carmen in our concert, happened to be performing another *Carmen* in a different concert, when we were rehearsing. In one, she acted as Carmen in western dress while singing the lyrics in Japanese in *Carmen*, and then she acted as Carmen in *kimono* while singing the lyrics in French in *Another Romance of Carmen*. So every day she switched her roles between the two Carmen, one in Japanese language and the other in French language.

When Carmen's white *kimono* was quickly changed to the red *kimono* in the second act, it was done by pulling out the thread on the kimonos. This was a difficult technique. I had been told that Ms. Kōno would not be able to pull the thread smoothly if it became wet with sweat. I was nervous during this scene while conducting the orchestra, knowing she was supposed to change the *kimono* dresses before the music ended. But I was relieved. At the moment when the white *kimono* was transformed into red, I heard applause from the audience.

Another Success at Expo

After those concerts, the Expo 2005 was to be held in Aichi Prefecture and the Central Aichi Symphony was going to perform *Another Romance of Carmen* again at the Expo Dome during the exhibition's Aichi Prefecture Week in September. We were thrilled by the news but were concerned about the heat at the dome and the possibility for typhoons. In past performances, we had been troubled by the heat and the humidity, so we were especially worried about how the singers in their *kimono* would be able to perform with no air conditioning.

Since the dome was large, the singers would have to use microphones to be heard. Because they would be moving on the stage, we decided to install the microphones inside the wigs of the singers. A giant screen was set up so that the audience could see the stage performance.

It was the last month for the Expo. From early in the morning, people waited in long lines to get in. *Another Romance of Carmen* was very popular and it was hard to get tickets. By the way, a chorus group always performed in *Another Romance of Carmen*. We thought it would be best if the residents of Aichi Prefecture participated in this Expo event since it was being held in Aichi. So the women's chorus group, *Madonna Kakitsubata*, which means iris in Japanese, was chosen to perform on the stage. They would sing in French. Male singers, including the chorus group, *Monsieur Kakitsubata*, joined the chorus and they spent days practicing. Since French spelling was difficult for the Japanese people, they transcribed the French lyrics into *katakana* characters and practiced singing until they had completely memorized them. A lady in the chorus told me that she felt as if the French lyrics were echoing inside her head whether she was awake or asleep. They must have had a hard time.

The opening time for the concert was 5 P.M. It was during the month of September, and the sun was still showing above us when we began the prelude. But, then it quickly grew dark. By the time the third act began, it was completely dark and the orchestra was performing with the music stand lights on. I was facing toward the stage and could not think about anything but *Another Romance of Carmen*, but later heard that the view of the sunset from the stage was gorgeous. A chorus of chirping insects also joined the concert, competing with

the men and the women in the chorus. We had another success. Many friends of mine came from Tokyo, Osaka and Fukuoka to see the concert. They told me later that they all had a good time.

Female Chorus Madonna *Kakitsubata*

I had started something big, something produced on a megaton level. It was the *Kakitsubata*, a female chorus that I founded in 2003. Today the chorus is made up of women who love singing and is active in the prefecture of Aichi. They practice together twice a month, singing Japanese folk songs and children's songs such as *Momiji*, *Hana*, and *Kōjō no Tsuki* that are no longer common to the younger generations.

Kakitsubata (Iris) is the official flower for the prefecture of Aichi. It is also the official flower for the City of Chiryū in Aichi. Since there was already another female chorus called *Kakitsubata*, we added *Madonna* to the name. We joked about the name, because *Madonna Kakitsubata* sounds like in Japanese, “Maa donna kakitsubata? (Oh, what kind of kakitsubata is it?)” Doing just practices would be boring, so we decided to plan a concert. By the way, when I plan any concert or project, I always set a goal first. And after I set a concert date and place, I begin practice. This time was not the exception, either. We started counting backward.

There was a large concert hall with 1800 seats in the Aichi Arts Center. On November 1st, the members of Madonna *Kakitsubata* would be standing on the stage. Of course they would not only be standing, but they would also be singing. They began practicing for the concert by reading the music score of a new song in each rehearsal, otherwise it would have been too late. I attended their rehearsals as often as I could. I had to, because I had initiated the plan. We also had to choose the stage costumes. Various things began moving forward quickly. Ms. Mitsuyo Yonehama who was in charge of its administration kept continuously busy with the preparations for the concert.

We asked *Ferice Matsueda*, a leading dressmaking company based in Nagoya for a rather unreasonable favor to design and make about fifty dresses for the chorus members. We decided to have the company design a white dress and a bolero with *kakitsubata* color (light purple). The members would look classy and beautiful on the stage but the dress they chose was designed for a wedding dress. And considering their ages, we had to order sizes twice larger than the normal size. It was because a wedding dress was usually designed for

a bride standing still and our chorus would be moving. Ms. Noriko Kakuta designed the official logotype of the chorus, and then the chorus officially began its activity.

I wrote the following notes in the concert flyer. *Singing is refreshing. It makes us feel refreshed even when we are dealing with something difficult. What a fun place of fellowship it would be if women who are active in various fields would gather and sing together. Out of such a vision, we have formed Madonna Kakitsubata. Nowadays, children no longer sing the Japanese songs we have sung for generations. As we sing, we desire to bring the message of the kindness of humanity and the heart to care for others. Watch and see how radiant we women are on stage.*

Adventure of *Madonna Kakitsubata*

It has been five years since I founded the chorus. I wonder how many concerts we have managed to perform in those years. Being the producer by myself, I have had numerous adventures with the chorus, such as creating various projects, performing with the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra, and participating in the opera performance at the Expo 2005 Aichi. In May 2005, we tried a concert in Tokyo, singing with an orchestra on the big stage of the Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre for publicity for the upcoming Expo 2005 Aichi. A large audience thronged the concert hall, which surprised the ladies of the chorus. But they were used to performing at a large concert hall in Aichi, so they were not overwhelmed. Another legacy of fearlessness was born there.

In September of the same year, the chorus played the choir part of *Another Romance of Carmen* at the Expo Dome. The chorus members transcribed the French lyrics into *katakana* characters and memorized them. Their strength impressed me. They have performed with professional singers and musicians many times. They even performed ballets, though it was only small parts.

People have said, “The bonus part of the chorus performance is always good.” They mean that the professional musician who plays with the chorus as the guest is always good. It takes me days and nights in planning, programing and even designing the flier. Ms. Yonehama, who is the manager of the chorus, brings my dreamy ideas into reality as much as possible. Ms. Kakuta, the designer, catches the impressions of the flier that I have in my mind and makes it into print. Ms. Mari Watanabe, the pianist, accepts my impossible requests and somehow performs with the music score that she had not gotten until the last minute. These people helped me continue the chorus for five years. Most of all, I have been helped by the members’ strength and extreme cheerfulness.

Although I had not done it much before, I also arranged Japanese songs for the chorus. I arranged *Zuizui Zukkorobashi*, *Mura Matsuri*, *Tanabata*, and even the famous *Boléro* for the chorus, which was amazing to me. Recently I arranged some opera songs by composers like Verdi, and the chorus has been singing the songs in Italian. So, our adventure continues.

Raising the Music Culture

The cities of Chiryū and Kariya in Aichi are the areas where my parents grew up and both cities have wonderful concert halls. They also promote activities on art and music culture.

The city of Chiryū owns its city culture center, *Patio Chiryu*. Mr. Seikō Iyoda, the former director of the center, has planned many creative events. I have been conducting the New Year Concert in this hall every year since 2003. A chorus group called Patio Theater Chorus, has been active in this city for quite a long time. The chorus performs on the stage every year at the New Year Concert. The group sings operettas in chorus, and Beethoven's 9th Symphony, Mass works and so on. I used to come to this city when I was a child to visit my grandmother. I even attended an elementary school in this city for a brief time. So I have lots of good memories.

The city of Kariya is the city where my parents attended their schools. Mr. Takehiro Isomura, the former director of the civic center, had a vision of promoting music culture for the city and has passionately planned orchestra concerts. Every year I perform a concert with the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra and soloists from this city. At one time even the local junior high school students performed with the orchestra.

Yet, the number of people who listen to classical music has not grown. In the regional cities, how many people actually go to concert halls to listen to classical music rather than listening to CDs? Despite such conditions, people like Mr. Iyoda and Mr. Isomura, engage in concert projects, working hard to create many spaces for the local artists. A concert place is a space where people gather and talk together. As our society is becoming an internet society, I hope that the activities at concert halls would also become active places for people to connect with one another.

Surrounded by Warmhearted Friends

After leading the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra for five years, my last concert as its resident conductor was held at the Shirakawa Hall in Nagoya in March 2004. I had met and worked with numerous soloists, singers and actors during those years. With the orchestra, I had performed many French compositions. We also performed operas such as Poulenc's *Les mamelles de Tirésias* and Weber's *Oberon*, in which the singers and the orchestra performed on the same stage. For the program for my last concert, I selected Richard Strauss' tone poem, *Don Juan*, Saint-Saëns' *Violin Concerto* (soloist, Ms. Yasuko Ohtani), and *Franck's* Symphony. I named the concert "Keep Pursuing Your Ideals."

I was completing this season as the resident conductor. So I chose *Le Jardin Féerique* from Ravel's *Ma Mère l'Oye* as an encore. This was the very first composition we performed when I had become the resident conductor five years ago. I conducted the piece, while playing a celesta by myself. Up until the concert began, I had feared that I might be moved to cry. But I did not. My expectations for the new season proved greater. Meeting with many warmhearted friends helped me to look ahead and move forward. I was overjoyed by the fact that I could start something new again.