

Studying in Paris Again

I was invited to Paris again, to stay for another three months. I had been chosen as the recipient of the overseas professional study program of the Agency for Cultural Affairs. It had been a while since I stayed in one place for such a long time. I would be trained at the Orchestre de Paris and the Orchestral Conducting Department of the École Normale de Musique de Paris, the same dear school where I had studied decades ago. I had many experiences ahead of me. Here is the record of my visit to Paris.

September 7th, Tuesday, 2004

The day I had been waiting for, the departure for Paris, finally came. Twenty-two years ago, when I left for France the first time, I went to Narita Airport in a hectic way. Nowadays, we live in a convenient world, and we can easily visit Europe anytime we want. When I was packing for this visit to Paris, I was surprised by how many different belongings we bring now, compared to what we used to bring: a computer, a digital camera, CDs and an MD player, and of course a cell phone. Today, we live in a different world. We feel as if time had jumped into the future. Back when I first went, we did not have credit cards and we carried cash or traveler's checks with us. For communication, we only had the option of writing letters or making a very expensive international collect call. Today we can send a text message, "I am leaving now," through a cell phone at Narita.

September 7th, Tuesday Evening, Paris

I could not stand the heat when I left Tokyo, but it was hot in Paris, too. The temperature was twenty eight degrees and it was like the middle of the summer. I had been expecting autumn weather, so I was surprised by the heat. People were wearing no sleeves and sun glasses. At a café, there was no breeze inside, so everyone was drinking beer on the terrace. This kind of view is what I would normally see during the vacation season. I stayed in a hotel near La Place du Trocadéro where the Eiffel Tower is located. There was a kitchen in the room so that I could cook by myself. The room was nice, though it was hot. How I loved the liveliness of Paris!

September 8th, Wednesday, sunny

My life in Paris started today. I began arranging my room so that I could

live comfortably, and went grocery shopping. There was a bakery nearby the hotel which made me happy because I could eat freshly baked breads every morning. But I could feel the heat even early in the morning. It was still summer time here. My room was located on the fourth floor and faced the backyard on the south. By 9 A.M. the sunlight came right into my windows and I got hot. I had brought long sleeve shirts and sweaters from Japan for the fall and winter seasons in Paris. I had only one short sleeve shirt with me, so I was washing and wearing it every day. Inside the room, wearing just a t-shirt was enough. I kept watching the weather channel to see when the temperature would go down.

I went to a supermarket, Casino, which was located five minutes away from the hotel by foot. At first, I was amazed by the variety of food there. There was a whole aisle of different kinds of yogurt. The variety of yogurt, made of milk, butter and cheese, low fat, no salt and so on, was beyond imagination. I agree that France is an agricultural nation. The people in France must be picky about their foods. The vegetables were excellent, too. Carrots and radishes were sold with leaves and stems still on. If I bought just one radish, I would have to eat nothing but radish for several days. They were that large. And all the vegetables were very fresh. Many of them were priced by the gram. On the top of the vegetable shelves, prices were written by one kilogram in Eurocurrency. In particular, figs were very ripe and tasty in this season in Paris. I remember eating the fruit with whipped cream when I had visited Paris before. Anyway, this supermarket was like a storehouse of the food culture in France. I liked it so much, and wanted to come every day.

September 10th, Friday, Sunny but Occasionally Cloudy

I went to a concert for the first time since I had come to Paris. Ironically the first concert I saw in Paris was a concert of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. I walked to the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées since my hotel was nearby. Because the Salle Pleyel, a large concert hall in Paris, had been under construction, most of the concerts had been performed at the theatre. There isn't much echo in this theatre. I have conducted here but I always felt anxious because I was not sure if the place was resounding. I listened to a Viennese waltz and *Pathétique* by Tchaikovsky, conducted by Valery Gergiev. Regardless of his interpretation of the piece, the Vienna Philharmonic sounded very good.

The whole string sections sounded together as one body. I saw that any first class orchestra provided excellent music to the audience wherever they may be.

Message from Paris, September 11

To Papa and Mama,

Finally I am able to email you. Somehow my computer is working after touching various buttons.

Let me share with you about this place. My hotel is in a wonderful location. In front of the hotel is the Avenue Raymond-Poincaré and I can easily walk to the Paris Métro Trocadéro. The théâtre des Champs-Élysées is two stops from the station. It is so close! The area is also filled with restaurants and cafés. There are two supermarkets near the hotel and I go shopping there every day. You would not believe how many kinds of goods they have. Even yogurt has tons of different kinds, and all are written in French and beyond my understanding! They have all kinds of vegetables and fruit. They even have avocados, figs, peaches and so on. It is so convenient I could live just by eating vegetables. Meat is sold in packages like in Japan. Street markets are every Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday. It is so good. No other place is as convenient as this place. It is perfect except for one thing...I have not found a place that sells good cakes.

I like my hotel room except that it gets really hot when the sun shines into the room from around 9 A.M., which is not comfortable. My room is cleaned once a week by the hotel staff, so other than that, no one comes to my room. I am so free. I get up in the morning, eat bread with jam (fig jam is tasty), drink a cup of tea, and then clean up the room and take a shower. An illusion happens when I go outside, because then I find myself in Paris. But I have no problem speaking French, so I wonder where I am now.

It started raining. Today I am going to eat at Le Train Bleu with Mr. Kimata from Nagoya. I will email you again. What a convenient time we live in now, indeed!

From Yoko

September 11, Saturday, Storming

An unexpected thing happened today. Due to terrorism, the whole world was cautious on this day, September 11th. The rain, which started falling in the afternoon, became intense and turned into a thunderstorm. I had made a dinner appointment with Mr. Kimata, a friend of mine from Nagoya, who was coming to Europe for business. We were supposed to meet in Paris. He had told me that he would come from London to Paris through the Eurostar train. But I had no contact from him at all. I suspected that the train had stopped or was late due to this rainstorm, and decided to wait for his arrival at the restaurant. The restaurant was located inside the Gare de Lyon, one of the mainline station terminals in Paris, and I expected him to come sometime.

Three hours after the scheduled time, the train finally arrived, and so did my friend. He explained that Japanese companies had a policy not to allow their employees to travel by air on September 11th just to prevent anything from happening on that day. He was frustrated by how unkind the Eurostar announcements were on the train. The train had stopped for a long time in France. They explained a lot in French but very little in English. Because he was fluent in English, he must not have been satisfied at all. This seemed to give him a negative impression of Paris. But the meal was very good, and the two of us got drunk on wine, and soon forgot about the rainstorm and returned home with happy feelings.

September 12, Sunday, Sunny

It was my first Sunday since I had come to Paris. Many restaurants and stores were closed and the town was quiet. I went for a stroll in the town for the first time in a while. I visited La Madeleine, a Catholic church, which was having an organ concert. The audience that gathered at the church was from all over. I was sure many of them were tourists. La Madeleine was a historic church where the French composers, Saint-Saëns and Fauré, had held positions as its organists.

I am convinced that you can listen to the best organ performances at churches. When I listened to the sound of the organ for the first time while studying in Paris, I was deeply moved and my tears did not stop. I could sense the depth of history in its solemn sounds.

The views in Paris were gorgeous, and I could see beautiful scenery from anywhere in the city. Various bridges were built over the Seine. Each of the bridges had its own distinctive character. Especially at sunset when the street lamps begin to be lighted, an unbelievable mood of sadness covers the whole view as if I were in a movie scene of an old movie that was made a generation ago.

Staying in Paris for a long time reminds me of the days when I had lived in Paris as a student. I did not care what kind of clothing I wore, because I was not there to eat at a fancy restaurant nor drink at a fancy café. I would walk in the city with a bottle of water in my hand. I would stop when I became thirsty and sit on a bench under the trees by the Seine to drink water. Then I would walk again with a sense of pride in such beautiful scenery of the streets in Paris, despite the fact that I was not French. I feel connected to Paris, the city where I had my first overseas experience at the end of my twenties. It feels like home. Twenty two years later, I am so delighted and blessed to come back and live in Paris again.

September 13, Monday

I brought my lap top computer for the first time on my overseas trip. I had some trouble sending and receiving emails at first, but have no problem now. I began receiving many emails from my friends in Japan. More typhoons have gone through Japan this summer than they usually do. I could easily learn the size and direction of the largest typhoons through their emails. I felt as if I could write its course map from what I read from their information. Mr. Hiroyuki Odano, my colleague at the Tokyo University of Arts and conductor, sent me an email, saying, "Until I read your message, I cannot tell if you are emailing from Paris or not."

September 14, Tuesday

It seems to be cooler than it was yesterday. Yet the temperature is around twenty one degrees. I visited the *Service Culturel et d'Information* at the Embassy of Japan in France, which was located right by the Arch of Triumph. When I complimented the staff on the location of the Embassy, the staff said that there were mice in the building. I sensed the long history of the building. "The

Avenue des Champs-Élysées used to be just fields, though it is very fashionable today,” said the staff with a smile.

In the afternoon, I visited the office of the Orchestre de Paris to get the orchestra’s schedule. The staff kindly gave it to me. The orchestra was going to have a concert tour in China from the middle of October, because this year, 2004, was the year of France for China and was also the year of China for France. The orchestra was planning to perform many French compositions such as Ravel’s *Bolero*. I was going to observe its rehearsal of Beethoven’s 9th Symphony as my first observation with the orchestra.

September 16, Thursday

Today I listened to a concert by the Orchestre National de France at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. The performance was conducted by Mr. Kurt Masur, who was full of energy. The orchestra performed the new composition *Correspondances* by the French composer, Henri Dutilleux, and *Scheherazade* composed by Rimsky-Korsakov. Mr. Dutilleux turned eighty-eight year old this year, and he appeared on the stage after the performance. He looked very lively. It made me glad to see the composer of whom I had only known through his orchestral scores. I felt as if I were in a dream as I listened to the composition filled with beautiful sounds.

Listening to the composition by a Russian composer, performed by the French orchestra, I felt a different image of the piece. It sounded very French. Ravel, a French composer, took Rimsky-Korsakov’s compositions as models for orchestration. I understand why he did. I think I will also create other colors of music when I conduct this composition next time.

The following day, I went to see the same orchestra’s rehearsal. Mr. Masao Takeda, who studied at the Tokyo University of the Arts during the same time as I had, has been singing in the choir of the national radio station, Radio France, which is equivalent to NHK in Japan. Radio France manages two professional orchestras and one professional choir. When I visited the choir that day, the choir was practicing *Joan of Arc at the Stake* composed by a French composer, Arthur Honegger. Many performers play in this piece, and some act and others sing as soloists. Ms. Marthe Keller has been performing the role of

Joan of Arc for decades and I saw her acting with sincere feeling during the rehearsal. She seemed to be in her sixties, but she acted as if a teen age Joan of Arc were present, according to Mr. Takeda. Both the orchestra and the choir shared the story to the full.

September 19th, Sunday

I visited my longtime French friend, Olivier. His family gathered in his house to celebrate his daughter's nineteenth birthday. Twenty-two years ago when I was studying overseas, I was a classmate with Olivier's younger brother, Frederick at the Orchestral Conducting Department of the École Normale de Musique de Paris. I have been in close relationship with his family since then. Both Olivier and Frederick are married now and have children. All their children have jobs related to music, or play musical instruments.

As our conversations went on, we naturally talked about music education. In France, funds were granted to each district and residents could learn music with fees based on their incomes, which were divided into ten categories. By paying between 40 Euros and 165 Euros annually, children could learn any musical instrument, music theory and chorus. They could even learn dancing. So the way they regard arts in France was completely different from Japan. There was a system in France in which children could naturally acquire music rather than through special lessons or apprenticeship.

Message, September 23rd

To Papa and Mama,

It has become much cooler in Paris, and I need to wear a jacket now. I think it is the holiday for the fall season in Japan now, isn't it? The Orchestre de Paris gave me permission to pass through the rehearsal. The École Normale will also start next week. Right now I am free, except for going to concerts at night.

My daily life here is convenient. There is a fish store, but I don't understand the names of the fish. The other day I checked the name of the fish after eating it, and it was swordfish. Yesterday I had a trouble choosing potatoes. There were many kinds and brands of potatoes sold in each net bag, holding about one and a half kilograms each. Some of them were for fries and others

were for boiling or stirring, according to the notes. Lately they have been selling packages of chicken tenderloin. Ham is also sold by packages of two, four and six, which is convenient. Unbelievable quantities of frozen food are sold here. They are selling a set of vegetables for pot-au-feu like an "oden" set in Japan. They have everything, including ingredients for authentic Chinese food, Vietnamese spring roll wraps, and other ethnic foods, but not Japanese food.

Obesity among women is a serious issue in Paris today because they always stir fry everything before cooking. I saw on TV a recipe for using tofu instead of mozzarella cheese.

Take care.

Yoko

September 24th Friday

I went to a concert to celebrate the eightieth year birthday of Mr. Georges Prêtre, a French conductor. He performed the overture of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and *A Hero's Life*, a tone poem by Richard Strauss, with the orchestra of *l'Opéra*. I had known of him but had never seen him conduct before. He walked up to the stage in a vigorous manner. He did not seem to be eighty year old. The moment he started the overture, I could see the depth of his music. I could tell that the music was performed by someone who has conducted orchestras for many years and thoroughly knows and understands the composition. His conducting was not easy to follow, but the orchestra performed with joy.

The performance of this conductor made me think about several things. There are various types of conductors, yet only a few conductors express themselves as human beings, beyond conductors or artists. His own life was expressed in the music, which influenced the expressions of the orchestra. The members were filled with joy and pride in playing the genuine music. It is not easy for an artist to be active for a long time, but Mr. Prêtre does it. So I was envious of him.

On this day, Françoise Sagan died in a hospital in Honfleur at the age of sixty nine. She was my favorite author. I saw her on TV in an interview right before her death. She was elegant and very French.

September 25th, Saturday

I moved to another place. Actually I just moved to the room next door. It was bigger than my room, and I thought it would be convenient. So I requested the room change. I emailed Olivier, who had had his daughter's birthday party the other day, "Since you gave us lots of delicious food, I gained a lot of weight and my room was getting too tight. I decided to move to a bigger room." He emailed me back saying that when his family read my email, they all burst into laughter.

September 27th, Monday

Today the École Normale had an entrance exam for the Orchestral Conducting Department. I vividly remembered the day when I took the examination years ago. On that day, I went to the hall without knowing anything and without understanding French. The atmosphere of the school had not changed at all. When I arrived at *La Salle Cortot*, a small hall in the campus, I saw about ten applicants gathering there. They were all tall and looked confident despite their young ages. Then various tests were held to check the applicants' levels, and I recognized Professor Dominique Rouits. When I was a student here, he was an assistant to my dear teacher, Professor Pierre Dervaux. Professor Bruno Gousset, a musicologist, gave them tests of listening to harmonies and of the simple knowledge of music. It was not easy. All of the written tests were written in French, so it was hard to understand them. In the afternoon, the applicants were given another test of conducting with a quartet and a piano. They could choose to conduct either the overture of *The Marksman*, or the overture of *Oberon*, both of which were composed by Weber. Regarding the level of the program, its level is the same as of music universities in Japan. All of the applicants had characters of their own, and it was fun to see them conducting. There weren't many French applicants. Benjamin, who was Swiss, had studied orchestral conducting in a music university in Japan and was fluent in Japanese. Kirov, a twenty year old Bulgarian, was the youngest applicant among them. Natalia was a Ukrainian woman, and others are from Mexico, Argentina and China. Two Japanese were also taking the exam. Because some of them understood French well, while others only understood English, the teachers spoke both in French and English to explain the test. When I was studying here, they only spoke in French and I had a hard time

understanding, but it was actually good for me. I am excited about how these students will grow as conductors from now on.

In the evening I observed the rehearsal of the *Orchestre de Paris* for the first time. Mr. Christoph Eschenbach was conducting Beethoven's ninth symphony. It has been performed several times during end of the year concerts in Japan but it hasn't been performed traditionally in Europe. Yet lately, it has been appearing in concert programs. The orchestra seemed not to be used to this composition. Mr. Didier Bouture was directing the chorus of the orchestra. He studied in the same class I did. He did not remember me, though, since it had been twenty two years ago. But soon we began talking about the memories we shared.

The stringed instrument sections of this orchestra sounded wonderful. Due to the construction of the resident hall, Salle Pleyel, the orchestra had been having concerts at Théâtre Mogador, located near l'Opéra. Since the theatre was suitable for performing arts, acoustically it was not that good. But the orchestra made wonderful sounds under such conditions. What I felt the most was the power of the musicians. They had the will to play good music, regardless of the poor acoustic condition of the hall or the conductor's ability. They performed with fullness of pride in being musicians. What amazed me, though, was that the members did not show up to their rehearsal until five or ten minutes before it started. They shouldn't have been that late. In Japan, some of the members would be practicing thirty minutes before it started. On the contrary, in Paris they do not show up until the very minute before it starts.

The Orchestre de Paris has its regular concert on Wednesday and Thursday evenings. The program is the same both days. They spend three hours for rehearsal on Monday and Tuesday between the morning and the afternoon. On the performance day, it has what is called *Generalprobe* (dress rehearsal) at ten in the morning for three hours before the concert which starts at eight in the evening. Its three hours rehearsal has only one short break, so the members have to keep their concentration for about eighty minutes. When I went, everybody played well. At first, I could hear some sounds out of sync, but as they kept playing together, their sounds came together excellently.

By the way, it is very French to see some stringed instrument musicians sitting in the back playing really strong. To be honest, they have no desire to play along with what the people in front of them play, but express their sounds with the conviction that this is what they want to play. They have strong characters, and are proud of expressing themselves independently. It is a very fun orchestra to observe.

October 2nd, Saturday

The Théâtre Mogador is a theater that the Orchestre de Paris uses for rehearsal and concert. Today, I went there to see the concert of another orchestra. It had a program with all Russian music. When I saw the outstanding performance of a young soloist in *the Violin Concerto* by Glazunov, I was aware of the high level of the orchestra's performance. And what impressed me the most was the program's main performance, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, originally composed by the Russian composer Mussorgsky. Later, Ravel, a French composer, arranged this piano suite for orchestration. I do not like this composition when it is performed with heaviness. I rather like to perform it colorfully like a French Impressionist painting, because I am convinced that Ravel must have been thinking of subtle and pretty sounds when he arranged this composition. What moved me the most tonight was the soft sounds that the brass instruments created.

This composition has an image of showy sounds by brass instruments. It starts with a fancy trumpet solo, and during the last movement, *The Great Gate of Kiev*, the music intensifies with the wonderful choral of brass instruments and the brilliant and loud percussion sounds. I wonder if the Russian composer tonight had asked the brass instruments section about its tone color. The sound of the brass instruments in the movement of *Catacombae* in the middle of the composition, in my imagination, created a sound like an eerie echo in a dark underground cave. It was soft, yet sometimes metallic and sharp. I thought that the focus of the performance was laid on the changes of tone color rather than on the techniques, which was exactly what Ravel had intended when he arranged this piece. That was why I was so impressed by the performance tonight.

Message, October 3rd

To Papa and Mama,

Lately the temperature has gone up to twenty degrees, and so it is not very cold. It has not rained at all. I wonder what is going on.

I am sure that French families are used to dealing with it, but since all the shops are closed on Sundays, supermarkets are packed with shoppers in the afternoon on Saturdays. Everyone hurriedly buys various things they will need for the weekend. I also go shopping on Saturdays, especially to have bread. Today I went to a natural food store because I had heard that the store sells soy sauce. I found tofu there, too. Right away I mixed tofu with bean sprouts and leek (the leek is thick here) and added Himmy seasoning and bonito fish pack to it. That was how I made yu-dōfu. It actually had a nicer taste than I had expected.

Next week I will visit the orchestra in Lille. Mr. Casadesus is still the resident conductor there. It will take me just one hour by the TGV.

Yoko

October 4th, Monday

I observed the classes on the first day of this term at the École Normale. I was looking forward to seeing how the classes would proceed and how I could engage. Each time I see Professor Rouits, we greet each other by kissing each other's cheek, which is a French custom called, *la bise*. This custom is done between people who have good friendships with one another. At first I felt this custom was strange, but I got used to it. Now I feel uncomfortable if I do not greet with *la bise*. For two men, they usually just shake hands unless they are very close friends.

The class at the Orchestral Conducting Department began with stretching exercises. After their bodies were loosened and relaxed, the instructor explained the movement of the arms to the students. They were given basic lessons such as how to show tempos and how to exercise in order to let the right hand and the left hand move independently. Then Professor Bruno Gousset, a musicologist, taught about music composition. This time, since the students were going study Mozart's symphonies No. 24 and No. 34, he began teaching on

the history of Mozart's symphonies. I was impressed by his knowledge of music. As he continued, he taught the historical background of when these symphonies were written. I admired Bruno, who could not only analyze each composition, but also teach in detail while playing the piano. After receiving general information about the piece, the students were given chances to conduct. In Japan, professors do not give the general information of each composition because the students are supposed to know it beforehand. But in reality, only a few students prepare for each conducting lesson by researching the historical background of the piece.

It is difficult to conduct any composition by Mozart. What I mean is that it is difficult to express the nuance of the composition, not the technicality of conducting. Professor Rouits asked me to comment on each student who conducted. I wanted to say several things but could not express them fully in French. I had no problem speaking French in normal conversations, but had a hard time when music was the topic of the conversation. Since today was their first class, the students did not show their characters yet. I looked forward to seeing them more.

October 5th, Tuesday

I went to another rehearsal of the Orchestre de Paris today. Today it was rehearsing Bruckner's *Symphony No. 5*. I had not heard much about his compositions. Once in a while I had heard his Symphonies No. 7 and No. 8, but I had not heard of the fifth symphony. So I began studying the score while staying in Paris. Today Mr. Marek Janowski conducted the orchestra. He used to be the music director of the Orchestre philharmonique de Radio France, so he rehearsed with the orchestra in French. He rehearsed in a very organized way, and it was clear to me that the orchestra quickly shaped the sound of the composition by his advice pointed. But members of French orchestras still talk a lot, which has not changed at all since I studied in France. Whenever a conductor stopped conducting, you could hear chatting from nowhere, so I heard the conductor shushing them many times. However Mr. Janowski was aware of French orchestral behavior, and once in a while gave the members a warning, "Please listen quietly so that we can rehearse smoothly." I had not seen such a well-organized rehearsal for a long time. I was sure that the orchestra was going to have a fine concert the next day.

October 6th, Wednesday

I spent the evening at the concert of the Orchestre de Paris. I was given a seat as an honored guest. For the first time in my life I received an invitation from the orchestra. My seat was on the second floor and must have been the best seat in the hall because of the sound quality. In the past I had gone to another concert of the orchestra to listen to Bruckner, but there was only a small audience. I thought that Bruckner was not well known to the people in France. Years later, the hall was packed with an audience, perhaps because the number of the people listening to Bruckner had increased. The audience seemed to be moved by his symphony.

October 7th, Thursday

I have been watching a TV program every morning. It is called *Télématin*, starting at 6:30 A.M. William Leymergie is the wonderful host of the broadcast show. William invites guests to comment on various topics with joy and laughter during the show. Of course news and weather forecasts are also presented in between the show. He has been the host of the show for quite a long time. His sense of humor is distinctly French and it is so fun to see him chatting with his guests, while gently teasing them. In addition, camera angles for the host and the guests are elaborate, which are different from a normal news programs where the host talks facing the camera.

The weather report in French is also fun to watch. It is presented several times between the news. At first, the weather forecasts for the morning and the afternoon are shown, but the weather map is not shown on the screen. For the temperatures of the regions, only numbers are shown on the map of France. Since the names of the cities are not displayed on the map, you would not be able to get any weather information about a city unless you knew its location. I sometimes watch the weather report with a map of France as a reference. Because the shapes of the mainland Japan is long sideways with distinctive shapes of bays and peninsulas, it is easy to locate cities. But the shape of France is just large and pentagonal, it is really hard to find locations. Nevertheless, the weather newscaster reports humorously every day. In France a person has to be humorous in order to be successful. I enjoy watching *Meteo*, the weather report. It does not show any weekly forecasts like in Japan, which

is troublesome, however. Perhaps, the weather in France is not as predictable as in Japan due to the topography of the country.

Télématin also shows advertisements for new movies. The biographical movie on the Italian painter Amedeo Modigliani has just been released, so I went to see the film. Originally, it was cast in English with French subtitles. The setting of the film was of course in Montmartre, Paris, and the film was about the unpopular painter Modigliani, the lover who dedicated herself to him, and his rivalry with Picasso, who had been the most glorious figure in fame and power in Paris at that time. It made me think how these artists, especially the painters, became successful in the world through all their hardships. The lover's sincere love to Modigliani was beautiful, and she committed suicide by falling from a window right after Modigliani died. The short-lived life of the artist, bonded together with the lover was frail, but must have been full.

Message, October 8th

To Papa and Mama,

It is raining here in Paris today. It must be raining in Lille, too. I heard that there was an earthquake yesterday. I get lots of information through emails from various people.

Yesterday I saw a movie, Modigliani. It was good. Many painters who had been living in Paris during his time were in the movie. Renoir was a really old man. Utrillo was his best friend. Picasso was a mean person who was always against him. It was fun to watch the movie. It showed what it really was like to live as an artist like Modigliani. After watching the movie, I can look at his paintings in a more familiar way.

I am leaving for Lille now.

Yoko

October 8th, Friday

I visited Lille, a city north of Paris, to listen to the orchestra there. Mr. Claude Casadesus is the music director of the orchestra, and he was one of the committee members of the International Besançon Competition for Young

Conductors as well as the final examination I took at the École Normale. I was going to see him for the first time in twenty years.

Transportation in France has become convenient since the TGV was completed. The TGV is a high speed rail service in France like the *Shin-kansen* in Japan, and it can take me to Lille from Paris in one hour. This was my first visit to Lille, and it was a large city. The city was located near Belgium, and the buildings and streets in the city had a little bit different atmosphere. As I expected, the mussel dish there was tasty. Having circled within the city and gotten lost, I finally arrived at the concert hall. It was a magnificent hall.

A long time ago, the orchestra came to Japan as its concert tour. The concert sounded much better today than it had back then. I met with Mr. Casadesus, and it was so nice to see him again. In France, excellent concert halls are built even in regional cities like Lille, and the people vigorously engage in music activities. A group of children were present at the concert today. These children seemed to be attending the music concert as a part of their education. The conductor gave many explanations to the children. They must be working hard to draw different age groups to listen to classical music.

October 11th Monday

I liked the way classes proceeded at the École Normale. First, the students were instructed in the background history of a composition and its music analysis. Then they conducted the composition with a piano. In the next step, they conducted it with two pianos. And on the same day, they conducted it with a small ensemble made up of a string quartet and several brass instruments. The students who had begun conducting in confusing ways at first gradually found their own way. By the time they conducted with the small ensemble, they were able to conduct with their own ideas and expression. I still had no clue about the European pedagogy of orchestral conducting, but I thought that the Japanese pedagogy, in which students are taught techniques first, needed to be re-considered.

In the afternoon, I saw another rehearsal of the Orchestre de Paris. The orchestra was rehearsing Beethoven's Symphony No. 6, *the Pastoral Symphony* conducted by Mr. Janowski. It was not playing a typical heavy Beethoven, but

a pastoral symphony with a refreshingly fast tempo. The stringed instrument musicians of the orchestra could really play. It was pleasant to see them play with the full length of the bows like a soloist, no matter how fast the passages might be. One of the contrabass players struck me as particularly interesting. The fourth movement of the symphony is a depiction of a thunderstorm in which contrabass players have to repeat an extremely fast passage. It is a section that every contrabass player has a hard time playing. All of the contrabass players frantically played, and when they finished the passage, one of them gave a gesture that smoke came out. It was as if he had played so fast that smoke was produced by the friction between the bow and the strings. When Mr. Janowski asked the stringed instrument sections to leave lingering sounds at a passage of pizzicato, all the contrabass players expressed the lingering sounds with their bodies, which was so humorous. Without a doubt, the Orchestre de Paris was a unique orchestra to see. Everyone was playing in each one's way, but its ensemble was good and they could produce a powerful *forte*.

October 12th, Tuesday

I went to the airport in Paris to pick up a friend who was visiting me. I heard a good story from the taxi driver while coming back to the city.

There are various types of taxi drivers. Some drivers keep talking on their cellphones while driving. Some listen to popular music at extraordinarily loud volumes. Others just keep driving without saying anything. The taxi driver on this day was playing piano music all the way, and it was a Chopin's piano composition. Curiously, I asked him for the reason. He told me that his four children had learned the piano. The three older sons did not keep learning the instrument because they did not like it, but the youngest son loved the piano and had talent. So, he was still learning the piano. The taxi driver himself loved piano music and always listened to it while driving his taxi. His story reminded me of a conversation I had had with Olivier's family. In France it was easy to learn the piano. That was why the driver was able to have his four children learn.

When we got out of the taxi, I could not help encouraging the driver, saying, "Please tell your son to keep playing the piano."

October 13th, Wednesday

I went to the concert of the Orchestre de Paris. The program was Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* and Schumann's *Piano Concerto*. Since I had seen its rehearsal on the pastoral symphony, I was looking forward to seeing its performance of the composition. I was also interested in the pianist, Lars Vogt, who was playing Schumann's concerto. I had never heard of him before, so this was my first time to listen to him. Indeed, he had great musicality. I liked him very much because he expressed Schumann's music romantically and because it was as if he were singing through each of his piano phrases. He played with such pleasant sounds. The encore piece by Chopin was impressive, too.

A while ago the following incident occurred. There was a young pianist who had just finished playing Shostakovich's piano concerto with excellence. As a response to the audience's non-stopping applause, he played an encore, *The Girl with the Flaxen Hair* by Debussy. That was a really bad choice. Choosing to play Debussy in Paris, especially a piece like this, which everyone in Paris knows so well, was risky. As I expected, the audience of the hall had to listen to the boring performance of such an ordinary piece by the distinguished pianist. Though the audience clapped their hands, the hall was filled with the sounds of people whispering to each other.

On the contrary, the pianist who played Schumann tonight expressed the music of Chopin in the encore greater than his expression of Schumann in the program. I had no doubt that I was not the only person who became a fan of this pianist tonight.

By the way, an orchestral concert begins with the A note by the oboe instrument. An oboe player plays the A note, and the other orchestra members "tune" their instruments with the sound. Everyone is used to the A note. But the sound of the note in this concert tonight was exceptionally beautiful. The echo of the sound reached throughout the hall, as if it conveyed the message that this was the oboe sound of the Orchestre de Paris. The audience heard this as the first sound, by which the sounds of the whole orchestra might be judged. The sound the oboe player delivered tonight had a very French color with a gentle touch like soft velvet. Just like anything else, a good beginning determines the rest.

October 14th, Thursday, cloudy with occasional rain

I went to Giverny to visit the house of Claude Monet, the Impressionist painter. The flowers in the garden were ending their seasons, so they lacked much strength. Monet is a very popular painter to Japanese people. This was my second time to visit his house. It was in his Japanese garden that he painted his famous works of the water lilies. The garden filled with colorful flowers in different seasons looked exactly like Monet's paintings. Many Japanese *ukiyo-e* paintings that Monet had collected were displayed inside the building, which had been transformed into a museum.

Having returned to Paris, I also visited the Musée Marmottan Monet to see his *Impression, Sunrise*. In this painting, he depicted the moments of the sunrise reflecting on the water with his own way of painting. I spent some time just looking at one of his large water lilies paintings at the museum. I had seen this painting many times before. That was when the word a friend of mine had once said suddenly came to me. I think it was at the exhibition of Wassily Kandinsky. "A masterpiece by a gifted painter allows us to even see the scene outside its picture frame." I also paint, so my friend's word surprised me. When I paint, in many cases I start designing the composition of my painting to make sure that I could draw everything within one canvas. But a gifted painter would paint a part of what impressed the painter in close-up. That is why such a painting gives a powerful impression and inspiration to those who look at it. If we limit the frame size in the beginning and try to compose a picture within the frame, the energy of the painting diminishes. Music and painting are common on this point.

October 15th, Friday, cloudy with occasional rain

Early in the morning, I set out to Honfleur. Many artists have painted the scenery of this town. I had not had a chance to visit this town until today. After riding on a train from Paris for two hours, I arrived in the station *Gare du Havre*. Then I used a taxi to Honfleur. The weather in Normandy was changeable. It was raining when I arrived at the station. Once in a while the sun came out between the clouds, and I saw a rainbow in the sky. Coming here, I knew why the painters desired to paint the sceneries of the town. It was a beautiful port town. Many sailboats filled the port, and the sight of the masts in straight lines was gorgeous. The outer walls of the buildings were painted in various colors.

Painters must have been overjoyed to see and portray all these buildings reflected on the water, creating the rainbow colors.

I went to the childhood home of the French composer, Erik Satie, in this town. Satie was said to be an eccentric person. He must have been, because his compositions are filled with sarcasm. Many titles of his works are bizarre, such as *3 Pieces in the Form of a Pear* and *Desiccated Embryos*. In the building, I was guided with headphones from room to room while Erik Satie's music was playing. Unlike an ordinary exhibition, the exhibition was visual and three-dimensional with a blend of sound, light, images and objects. It was not just a memorial house but a place to experience the fantasy of space.

I wanted to get some Calvados since I was in the region of Normandy. It is a strong brandy made from the apples of the region, and is supposed to be good for digestion. If you have some Calvados during a meal, you are supposed to regain your appetite and eat more. I found one and took it back to Paris. And since then, I made it a habit to pour it over the vanilla ice cream on my desert plate every night. This was tasty. I was glad to finally visit the town of Honfleur after having wanted to do so for such a long time.

My trip to Normandy helped me realize that the winter season was coming. I had been looking forward to enjoying the fall season in Paris, but I experienced the hard winter life of the people in the northern region of France, and appreciated their abundant food. On top it all, I saw a beautiful rainbow.

October 17th, Sunday

I finally had dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Ishimura, residents in Paris, for the first time in a long time. We have known each other for years. Whenever I visited Paris, I would visit their house and we would talk until late at night. The couple love wine and have researched it. I often got drunk on wine while listening to their talk. We always talk about how thinking is different between Japanese and French cultures.

October 18th, Monday, cloudy

I set out early in the morning to observe another rehearsal of the Orchestre de Paris. I could not control my joy, because they were going to

practice a French composition, Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*. The orchestra must have performed this composition many times, so I was sure that it would perform with its own interpretation as a legendary orchestra.

However, the orchestra was making some "strange" sounds during the rehearsal. Mr. Eschenbach, a German conductor, was conducting the Orchestre de Paris, a French orchestra, and the two different styles of sounds were expressed simultaneously. The two strong characters were crushing one another. It was as if I were in the midst of the whirling current of the Naruto Strait, Japan.

Personally I like the school of traditional French music. Recently all the orchestras have become internationalized and have been losing the sounds of their own national colors. But whenever I listen to the album of an orchestra recorded during its old good days, I can smell the national fragrance through its traditional sounds.

No matter who might be conducting, the Orchestre de Paris seems to have enough room to have fun while playing a French composition. While practicing *Boléro*, the contrabass players were playing humorously, playing the bass next to them.

A friend of mine, who plays a violin for the orchestra said to me, "I would rather play for a conductor who can perform a good concert than for a conductor who rehearses rigidly. This word made me ponder.

October 19th, Tuesday

I spent another morning watching the rehearsal of the Orchestre de Paris. It surely sounds much better the second day when performing in a complete manner. In the afternoon, I had lunch with Mr. and Mrs. Robin. We have had a close friendship with each other since I came to France for my study abroad in 1981. Mrs. Jacqueline Robin is a pianist and has premiered many compositions by French composers. *L'église de la Sainte-Trinité de Paris* is a church located near the place where the Orchestre de Paris rehearses, and a French composer, Olivier Messiaen had played in this church as its organist for many years. We had a meal at a *brasserie* right in front of the church. I heard that Mr. and Mrs.

Messiaen used to come to this restaurant all the time. I had a very fun time with the Robins.

October 21st, Thursday

I will be leaving France in a month. Time passed slowly at first. But as I became more active, it got busier every day. Yet, I am not busy doing chores like I was in Japan. Here I am thinking about nothing but music every day, which makes me happy. I am soaking myself in the sounds of music.

Today I listened to a rehearsal of the Orchestre de Paris for its tour in China. The orchestra did not rehearse for its concert tonight this morning.

Tonight I went to the concert of another orchestra. The London Symphony Orchestra had been visiting Paris with Mr. Pierre Boulez, a conductor. I had bought a ticket earlier because I wanted to go to this concert. The program was Mahler's Symphony No. 7, a rare composition performed in a concert. My seat was the second from the front row, so I was able to see the conductor's expression clearly. Mr. Boulez was an eighty year old virtuoso conductor. As a composer himself, he first performed his own composition, and then the symphony by Mahler. That Mahler was outstanding. The London Symphony Orchestra was excellent and was in perfect order. I wondered at how different its atmosphere was from the Orchestre de Paris.

To start with, the way the orchestra members appeared on the stage seemed to be different. The way they walked was pretty and they were all smart. I looked at them carefully and found that they were dressed in stylish tailcoats. Actually, the members of the orchestra, especially the male members, were rather tall and skinny. The members of the Orchestre de Paris are rather short. It made me think of the food culture in France. Of course the food in Paris is good. They have various kinds of wine and cheese as well as sweets and chocolates. If one is not careful, you can eat too much and end up gaining weight. On the contrary, when I went to London last time, I was not happy with their food. I wonder if the fact that the members of the London Symphony Orchestra walked smart and played smart was actually caused by their food culture.

The following day, I saw Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* performed by the

same orchestra. I was overwhelmed by the virtuoso conductor's conducting. This composition is demanding for a conductor and makes the conductor tense, because it is filled with irregular tempos. But Mr. Boulez conducted this complicated composition with ease and smoothness. I could not help but admire and respect him. I experienced great music performances both days.

October 26th, Tuesday

I visited Orléans today. It took me about an hour to get there from Paris by train. The town was famous for Jeanne d'Arc, and was a quiet city due to a smaller population. I went to a restaurant in the town for lunch. The people were taking more time to eat than in Japan. There was an atmosphere of time being stopped, rather than the time being slow. The local French people, as well as the tourists, seemed to be enjoying such a time to eat. There are many business people in Paris that are time oriented and return to their work immediately after their meals. But in a regional place like Orléans, time seemed to be slower. I sometimes wonder if there are more than twenty-four hours in Paris. But, to be more correct, there are many people in Paris who just want to maximize their twenty-four hours each day.

Message, November 3rd

To Papa and Mama,

It is cloudy in Paris today. The Sun may shine at noon. It is comfortable inside my room, but it is probably about nine degrees outside. It feels chilly rather than cold. The winter has not come yet.

The TVs were broadcasting the election for the US President throughout the night till this morning. The newscasters were broadcasting live news from the US. Perhaps the people in Europe are more interested in the election than the people in Japan.

I will email you again later.

Yoko

November 10th, Wednesday

I went to a gathering of the Rotary Club in Taverny, a suburb of Paris.

Mr. and Mrs. Robin were members of the Rotary Club. I was invited to attend its dinner meeting. I had been asked in advance to speak on my activities as a conductor in Japan and on music business in Japan, so I talked on the current situations of Japanese culture. Several people asked questions that I could not answer well. They wanted to know how Japanese orchestral organizations manage as a business. It was not easy to explain an issue that I was unfamiliar with to the people in French.

They earnestly listened as I shared with them my experience of studying abroad, winning of the International Besançon Competition for Young Conductors, conducting a Paris concert sponsored by the Rotary Club, and conducting as the resident conductor of the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra. They were glad to see me visiting the school in Paris where I had studied more than twenty years ago, and giving advice to the students.

Message, November 14th

To Papa and Mama,

It has gotten colder and I could see my breath. It rained on and off yesterday and it was really cold when I was walking outside. I wore two sweaters, a woolen jacket and a muffler. I wish I had gloves. I am sure it will get warmer again, but I will have to find an overcoat. Only one week is left, and I will be back to Japan very soon.

Please take care not to catch a cold.

Yoko

Message, November 21st

To Papa and Mama,

Only three days are left. I have enjoyed Paris very much, since I am used to living here. Yesterday I watched the ballet The Sleeping Beauty at L'Opéra de la Bastille. It was good. Tomorrow, Monday, will be my last day at the École Normale. I have gotten to know my students. The other day, when I bought them lunch as my treat, they were so happy. A student from Switzerland, who had studied in Japan before, said that only Japanese people would do this kind of hospitality.

Some French students are from far cities like Bordeaux and Montpellier. They leave early in the morning and commute to school by train for more than three hours. All the students are earnestly studying music.

I will be back with winter clothes on. See you soon.

Yoko

November 25th, Thursday

I did not realize that I had not cleaned my hotel room until I was sitting on the airplane back to Japan. I had left my toothpaste, toothbrush, food in the refrigerator and in the closet. I had even left my slippers and shoes. A stranger who saw the room would think that I would be returning. I had thought for sure that I had packed everything. Unfortunately, I left most of my everyday necessities behind. A Japanese proverb says, "A bird does not foul the nest that it is about to leave." That was not the case with me.

Truck drivers had a strike the day before my departure date, and there was a possibility for traffic on the streets. I decided to leave the hotel earlier just in case. That might be the reason why I forgot to clean up my room. Or perhaps, I just had a strong desire in my heart to come back to Paris again. I left Paris with mixed feelings.

My stay in Paris for eighty days as the recipient of the overseas study program of the Agency for Cultural Affairs had come to the end. I have visited Paris many times, but this time I was able to identify various changes and movements of the society. Most of all, I had great fellowship time with the students at the École Normale. Each of them gave me good wishes on my music score (which can be seen at the end of this book). They wrote in various languages. I was blessed to return to my dear school where I had studied, and to give advice to the current students. I cannot wait to see these students standing on the conductor stands of concert halls in the future.

In closing, I found the overseas study program of the Agency for Cultural Affairs beneficial.