

Preface

Twenty-six years have already passed since I won the International Besançon Competition for Young Conductors in 1982. Since then, I have run my life at full speed and many things have happened. During these years, I experienced a shoulder injury, acted as the resident conductor at the Central Aichi Symphony Orchestra in Nagoya, my hometown, and met people from various fields.

I also started doing water color paintings and became a member of the Daicho Kai where I met people from the field of painting. As I began to realize the hidden sense of colors within me, I gained ambition to produce a variety of concerts. I wondered if I could create the colors of sound with an orchestra, just like mixing colors on a palette.

I have come this far, encouraged by many people and supported by heavy rain, snow, and the typhoon, my friend. And even before I knew it, I was surrounded by wonderful friends to play music with me and for me.

The stream of such life began in Besançon, France, on September 14th, 1982. I want to let the stream wind more widely and more actively than before.

Yoko Matsuo

Prologue

It happened in a moment. It was as if I were watching a slow motion video, with my body up in the air. The next moment, I found myself slipping down the stairs. I realized that I had lost my footing. I had just finished conducting a complex concerto, and I decided to enjoy my vacation and set out for shopping. It was raining outside and the soles of my shoes were wet, which caused me to slip on the stairs. Before realizing what was happening to me, I had slipped all the way down to the bottom without stopping. When I did finally stop, I touched my right shoulder. It was swollen. I made a sound judgement that it was dislocated. It was my poor mother who had been next to me and had seen the entire accident. Her face was pale. She did not understand what had happened, and was worried about what would happen to me after the accident.

Immediately we went to a hospital and had my right shoulder relocated into the joint. I asked the doctor, "Another concert is coming in three days. I can conduct the concert, can't I?" I was too optimistic. The doctor sternly warned me, "No way. You must fix your shoulder firmly and keep it immobilized. Otherwise, it could be easily dislocated again. This has to be treated cautiously, because you are a conductor." I had never had a serious injury in my whole life, and had never cancelled a concert due to sickness. "Something very serious must have happened," I realized. But I was still not taking the situation seriously, thinking that I could manage to conduct with my left hand.

It turned out that I was not allowed to move my right arm for six weeks and the right arm had to be wrapped tight. There were so many things that I had to do, such as cooking and eating a meal, drinking wine, and playing the piano. At first I used a spoon and fork with my left hand to eat, and then I began using chopsticks with the left hand. I typed letters in my word processor with my left hand, of course. I was told that my left hand writings were neater and easier to read than my right hand writings. I liked making *gyoza* dumplings, so I prepared them with my left hand. It was a little hard to pull the cork out of a wine bottle at first. Then I found out that I could open it easily if I turned the bottle rather than the cork. My left hand gradually gained strength and dexterity.

One day I set out to ride the *Shinkansen* to conduct a concert. The concert on that day happened to be an event during the general assembly of the Japanese Association of Medical Sciences, and it was performed by the Aichi Medical Association Orchestra. Many doctors were members of the amateur orchestra. So, a great argument started when they saw my right arm disabled. After the rehearsal, the doctors discussed whether or not I should keep my right arm wrapped tight. “Although it is dislocated, holding the arm immobile would cause her to lose muscle activity, and it might cause some hindrance for her conducting career in the future. So, she should just fix the shoulder and leave the other parts free to move.” “No, it would be better to keep the whole shoulder and arm fixed just in case.” In the end, I decided just to fix my right shoulder while keeping the right arm and hand free to move. Now I think it was the right choice. Nevertheless, it was still inconvenient. Many concerned friends contacted me. It was not funny that a conductor had dislocated her right shoulder. They thought I must have been discouraged. But actually I was fine. I was just busy doing all I could do, since it took more time and energy to do everything with my left hand alone. For conducting, when I could not communicate with the orchestra with my left hand only, I exaggerated my body movements to express what I wanted. I shook my head. I communicated with my facial expressions. I maximized everything I could utilize, which was an incredible experience.

I also learned to change my perspectives. When facing a situation where I could not do what I used to do such as pulling the cork from a wine bottle, this led me to look at it from another angle. When I dried my hair, instead of moving the hair dryer, I moved my head while holding the dryer still. When I wore a *kimono* in a hotel, instead of wrapping my *kimono* with the waist strap, I moved my body so that I could wrap myself in the *kimono*. I spent each day in inconvenience, but I had never experienced such refreshing moments in my senses before.

The accident happened in 1995, the same year when a disastrous earthquake hit the Kobe and Awaji area, and during the same time when the Tokyo subway was attacked with sarin chemical. While visiting the hospital for regular checks, I felt that my injury of dislocation was nothing, compared with others who were there. As I watched people living in more difficult situations

with wheelchairs, I felt how fortunate I was. To live is the first priority for my life, and my position as a conductor allows me to live such a life.

What a fortunate life I am living each day to be involved with music, my favorite thing. The dislocation of my shoulder was a chance for my perspectives in music and life to change. I had been striving as a proud and stubborn conductor. But because of my accident, I changed, becoming a conductor more involved with people through music.