

27th Takarazuka International Chamber Chorus Contest

Held after the Great East Japan Earthquake



*By Mitsukazu Suwaki, TICC Vice-President,
former IFCM Board Member*

The 27th Takarazuka International Chamber Chorus Contest was held on July 23-24, 2011, at Vega Hall in Takarazuka, Japan, a satellite city located between Osaka and Kobe with a population of 220,000. The Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11 took many lives, forcing a number of choral events and music festivals scheduled across Japan to be cancelled; there was thus concern about holding the 27th TICC so soon afterwards. However, thanks to the significant encouragement we received both domestically and from abroad, it was with great pleasure that we were able to make it happen. We are especially glad to have drawn participants from the affected areas of Miyagi and Fukushima: These singers told us they were delighted to participate in the contest

despite losing their rehearsal rooms in the tsunami and not being able to prepare well. Looking back, we realized that the success of the contest held after the Great Hanshin Earthquake sixteen years ago was also due to the great support of our choral associates, although parts of Takarazuka City and a pipe organ at Vega Hall had been severely damaged.

A total of twenty-two choral groups took part in the TICC this year, including overseas choirs from Lithuania and Korea, competing in four categories: 'Renaissance/Baroque', 'Theater Pieces', 'Contemporary Music' and 'Folklore'. Aichi High School Choir won the first place overall title, turning in a great performance with a song composed by Jozef Karai.

Wakayama Children's Choral Group came in second, in the 'Theater Pieces' section. Third place went to Asaka Chorverein, from the earthquake affected Tohoku area.



*Choir "Kivi" (cond.
Danguole Aukseliene) –
Lithuania*

For the first time, we held in addition to the concert a two-day choral workshop led by Ms. Theodora Pavlovitch, who was also one of the TICC jurists from overseas. She conducted a Bulgarian folk song and her own arrangement of George Gershwin's I Got Rhythm, leading a 30-voice female choir

comprised of singers from different Takarazuka City choral groups. As a result of her powerful leadership and sense of humor, she brought out their singing voices beautifully at a winners' concert held on the final day, bringing the TICC to a close with great applause.



*Workshop with Theodora
Pavlovitch*

We are proud of having had distinguished choral directors and professional choral groups from abroad in this year's contest, which marked our 27th year. Not only did they give great singing performances at Vega Hall, they also offered their compliments on its acoustic system. For Japanese choirs, competitions and exchanges with overseas choirs such as the Schola Cantorum Gedanensis (Poland), Pro-Musica-Chamber-Choir (Sweden), Jauna Muzika (Lithuania), Estonia Philharmonic Chamber Choir (Estonia), and Vancouver Chamber Choir (Canada) provide the best opportunities for learning choral music. In this way, outstanding groups representing Japan, such as the Kyoto Academy Choir, the Mulberry Chamber Choir, Vocal Ensemble EST, and Choeur Chêne, have been developed and now perform internationally.

Also, I would like to mention the new 'Theater Pieces' category, begun only in 2007. What is a theater piece? The

term is defined as a style of performance in which the singers use the entire auditorium in many different ways, not limiting themselves to a stylized performance on stage. It is common in acting performances where the on-stage singing source may move around. Or it can refer to the extensive use of audience seats, aisles, backstage or the balcony of a singing space as the sound source. In such circumstances, singing and acting are often improvised, i.e. centered apart from the conductor's instruction. Japanese composer Minao Shibata (1916-1996) was a pioneer in this genre. *Oiwake bushikou* (1973) as represented by him was first created specifically as a theater piece. The Wakayama Children's Choral Group, this year's winner in the 'Theater Pieces' category, performed *The Blue Eye of God* by Nancy Telfer and the *Agnus Dei* by Hideki Chihara, successfully creating a beautiful sound-space that filled the hall with great choral voices. Hopefully these concerts are not only about competing in singing skills but are also new opportunities for creating your own choral music.



*Wakayama Children's Choir
(cond. Haruhiko Numamaru) –
Japan*

Last, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the enthusiastic support of and generous contributions from our

choral associates abroad for the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake. We have also received great support in the form of singing, such as the Sing It for Japan movement. The TICC continues to lend our voices to projects that hope to rebuild the affected areas.

We will see you at the 28th TICC, to be held July 21-22, 2012.

Edited by Anita Shaperd, USA