

30 Years of Musical Heroes
By TONY GREGG
SGI-USA Music Corps Chief

SGI President Ikeda describes the founding of the Music Corps in Japan in his book *The New Human Revolution*:

Josei Toda taught and trained Shin'ichi that the way to foster youth was to see how much they could accomplish through their own efforts.

When Shin'ichi first joined the Soka Gakkai, the attitude and behavior of his seniors in the youth division caused him to dislike the organization. Many of these older youth division leaders were high-handed and autocratic, yet refused to take any responsibility themselves. Shin'ichi was always deeply discouraged by their attitude.

One day, he voiced these feelings frankly to Josei Toda, who then told him: "In that case, Shin'ichi, why don't you go ahead and make the Gakkai into the kind of organization that you can really like? Build an ideal Gakkai through your hard work and earnest effort!"

Shin'ichi did just that, working tirelessly in the face of great hardship to create a Soka Gakkai that met with his ideals.

Shin'ichi perceived kosen-rufu as a great cultural movement. And it was he who, as youth division chief of staff, established the Music Corps in May 1954. None of the older leaders or directors of the Soka Gakkai showed any interest in such a plan. Ultimately, Shin'ichi took it upon himself to buy instruments for the band. This was the beginning of what has today become a world-renowned musical organization. (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 199)

Meanwhile, as the Music Corps continued to develop in Japan, Mr. Ikeda had established the America Headquarters. In the latter part of 1966, a small group of young men formed a band that would later be known as the America Young Men's Division Brass Band. On Friday, May 5, 1967, the newly formed Brass Band held its first recital at the Embassy Auditorium in Los Angeles. The entire band played six Sousa marches. Then selected members, who called themselves "The Unknown Band," played several numbers, including "Sansho Shima Sayonara," one of the highlights of the program.

After "The Unknown Band," the Brass Band played a series of Soka Gakkai songs. On the last song, "The Sun Shines Over America Headquarters," the YMD leaders all led the audience in the singing of this popular song. Later in the month, on May 16, the band played for President Ikeda for the first time at the opening of Myohoji temple in Etiwanda, Calif.

The band in the United States continued to grow, as did the organization, through seemingly non-stop times of vigorous propagation, parades, conventions, civic events and culture festivals. Throughout the '80s the bands were predominately marching units.

One highlight was the formation of a 1,000-piece marching band that paraded down Kalakaua Avenue in Honolulu during the summer 1985 Hawaii convention. This incredible momentum continued until 1990 when all of SGI-USA experienced a great shift in focus and direction.

Those dedicated individuals who have continued to keep the Music Corps fires burning in their respective areas, particularly over the last few years, surely know what it means to have the stand-alone spirit. For as seemingly unrecognized as their efforts have been, the YMD music groups in the United States are continuing to grow and develop young men for the future of kosen-rufu. Past and present Music Corps members will tell you how their experiences in the band have been a foundation for their faith and their lives.

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President Ikeda recently noted “that Buddhism places great importance on music. To secure happiness for all human beings, culture should take precedence over such fields as science, politics and economics.” He remarked that “music, which directly reaches the depths of human life, can be said to be the supreme art that enables humankind to become truly happy.”

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