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‘Art is not a slave to ideology or politics, nor is it a slave to religion. It has a value all its own, and so it is only natural to recognize and treasure it.’

The concert celebrating the founding of the Min-On Concert Association featured a chorus, a musical ensemble and performances by a leading violinist and cellist. Then the president of a local music college gave a brief congratulatory speech on behalf of the other guests, followed by words from Eisuke Akizuki, who had been appointed Min-On’s executive vice president.

Akizuki began by stating that the full name of the organization was Minshu Ongaku Kyokai, or “The People’s Concert Association,” and that its goal was to promote music widely for all to enjoy. He explained that at first there was talk of calling it “The Public Concert Association,” but Soka Gakkai President Shin’ichi Yamamoto had suggested changing it to “people’s” because it is the people who are the true sovereign of society and the nation, and who play the leading role in fostering music and the arts.

Akizuki continued: “I would next like to introduce the five principles of the Min-On Concert Association. They are: 1) to promote a vibrant and thriving musical movement widely among the people; 2) to create and develop a new music for the people; 3) to promote music education for youth and raise the general level of music appreciation toward the realization of a rich cultural life for the people; 4) to deepen international cultural exchanges through music and establish friendly ties linking people around the world; and 5) to nurture musicians and present their finest works and performances at home and abroad.

“In order to develop a new musical movement of the people in accord with these five principles, the association will sponsor regular performances, including those on the metropolitan level. Our goal is to create a new current in music culture that will return music to the people.”

After Akizuki finished speaking, Hiroshi Izumida, a Soka Gakkai vice general director and now executive president of Min-On, asked the audience for its continued support of the association and its activities. Next, the Fuji Wind Ensemble played the *Light Cavalry Overture* and other pieces, and for the finale, the famous Japanese composer and conductor Hidemaro Konoe conducted the march, *Old Comrades*.

When the performance was finished, the hall erupted in enthusiastic applause. This was the Min-on Concert Association’s maiden voyage into society as the flagship of a new musical and cultural movement of the people. There were many guests in attendance that day, and they all expressed support for Min-On’s guiding principles and goals. Such a flourishing of music born from the people had long been waited for.

At the time, the average person in Japan listened to popular music, but wasn’t so familiar with classical music or opera. Tickets to such concerts were very expensive, most likely because promoters were looking to make a profit, which made them inaccessible to a large part of the population. Shin’ichi believed that the first priority of the Min-On Concert Association was to provide people with an opportunity to enjoy all types of music, including classical, opera, and traditional Japanese. Music is for everyone. It is not the exclusive possession of the privileged or wealthy.

The Workers' Music Councils (Ro-On) was another major organization promoting musical appreciation at the time, but most people thought it was too political and ideological. In contrast to this group, in 1963, the same year of Min-On's founding, the Japan Federation of Employers' Associations established the Musical Culture Association (On-Kyo), but its scope was still rather small.

Shin'ichi was pleased with the prospect that both of these organizations might also offer fine music to a broad spectrum of people. His hope was that Min-On's birth would spark the creation of fresh culture by giving ordinary people more opportunities to experience music of the highest caliber.

During the concert celebrating the founding of Min-On, Shin'ichi was at Soka Gakkai Headquarters chanting for the success of the event and the association's growth and development. After the concert was over, Hiroshi Izumida and Eisuke Akizuki returned to the headquarters. It was just after 10:00 p.m.

"It was a great success," Izumida told Shin'ichi. "The guests were very receptive to the founding principles of Min-On, and they expressed great hopes for its future."

"That's wonderful. Congratulations!" said Shin'ichi.

Akizuki elaborated: "Actually, until tonight's concert, many people in the music world seem to have been of the opinion that the Soka Gakkai founded Min-On in order to use music and art to expand its influence.

"Also, one guest asked whether Min-On would avoid sponsoring performances of music related to any other religion, such as that celebrating Christmas. Since the Soka Gakkai does not compromise in matters of religion, this person thought that Min-On, as an affiliated organization, would reject any art or music that had religious overtones."

Izumida then added: "Mr. Akizuki, there are some Soka Gakkai members who think the same thing."

The Soka Gakkai has always distinguished clearly between superior and inferior, deep and shallow, and correct and erroneous when it comes to religious teachings. This is because whether we are genuinely happy or not is determined by the religion we uphold. Consequently, there were many members who felt uncomfortable about performing or listening to music that was related to other religious traditions.

Religion and art are certainly intertwined. Religion cultivates the earth of our being, our life itself, while art brings flowers and the fruits of culture to bloom in that earth. But appreciating the art that is born from a particular religious tradition is not the same as believing in that religion. Though religious feeling may be the wellspring of artistic creation, once the art is created, it transcends religion.

A beautiful flower delights and refreshes the hearts of all people equally, no matter what soil it grows in. That is the power of beauty. The same is true of great art. It is this spirit that the German poet Heinrich Heine sang of when he wrote that once the peapod bursts open, the sugar peas inside are for everyone to enjoy.

To categorize art by its religious or ideological content and reject it on that basis is to reject humanity itself. Furthermore, Buddhism teaches respect for the dignity of life, of freedom and equality. It is a philosophy of compassion that enables us to bring our humanity to full bloom. Since the Soka Gakkai's musical movement is based on Buddhism, it is completely mistaken to categorize and reject any music that is an expression of our shared humanity. This was Shin'ichi's feeling and also his firmest conviction.

Shin'ichi addressed Izumida and Akizuki: "I am concerned about Soka Gakkai

members falling into a narrow and dogmatic way of thinking. Our strictness is aimed at religious teachings themselves. We must make it understood by both our membership and society that we are entirely open-minded when it comes to art and culture.

“Art is not a slave to ideology or politics, nor is it a slave to religion. It has a value all its own, and so it is only natural to recognize and treasure it. Furthermore, I have not the slightest intent to use the activities of the Min-On Concert Association to propagate Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism or bring music lovers into the Soka Gakkai. That must also be made very clear. My purpose in founding Min-On is to return music to the people. It is to create a humanistic culture, join the hearts of people around the world through music, and to contribute to world peace.”

Shin’ichi spoke with determination: “Many religions have used art and culture and even the cause of peace as a means to expand their influence. Rather than seeking to develop and contribute to the arts, they have exploited them temporarily for their own interests. Such pretension, however, cannot endure. Eventually, the true intentions of such religions are exposed and those who were once supporters begin to leave. Deceit is always uncovered in the end.

“But our movement for culture and peace is different. Our goal is to contribute to the arts. We are serious about this. We are advancing a great movement for the people, for humanity.

“At first, many people will probably be skeptical about our motives, but eventually they will see that they are wrong. Thirty or 40 years down the road, they will appreciate the profound significance Min-On has come to have in society. At the same time, it is up to us to make that happen. I want Min-On to become a global music association. I want people to say that it revived the musical world, that it gave rise to wonderful music, and that it linked the hearts of people and united the planet.”

Izumida and Akizuki nodded deeply in agreement.

The Min-On Concert Association soon expanded nationwide, and in January 1965 it was incorporated as a foundation. It went on to make great contributions to music and art, growing into a major Japanese musical and cultural organization with 1.3 million supporting members.

Its activities were varied, and it sponsored concerts of a vast range of musical genres, including classical, popular and traditional Japanese. It also promoted free town concerts, as well as school concerts to contribute to the musical education of children and young people. And it started the Tokyo International Music Competition to discover and foster new musical talent.

As part of its international exchange activities, in 1965 Min-On brought an Israeli pianist to Japan, and in the following year the Soviet National Academy Novosibirsk Ballet. Later it sponsored Japan tours of such world-renowned companies as the Vienna State Opera and the Scala Theater of Milan. It also sent many Japanese musicians and dance troupes overseas. Its international exchange activities have extended to 76 countries and regions to date.

The establishment of the Min-On Concert Association through the auspices of the Soka Gakkai breathed fresh life into the world of music and art in Japan.

Daisaku Ikeda appears in the
novel as Shin’ichi Yamamoto.
The events take place in 1963.