

An unforgettable introduction to musical life in Japan **and to Japanese culture...**



Saturday 30 March, Matsue, Japan. The final notes of D. Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony resound from the 120-piece orchestra of the Toyota Youth Orchestra Camp, conducted by Shigeo Genda. Immediately afterwards, we are treated to a beautiful performance of Finlandia by J. Sibelius, performed by the same orchestra, supplemented by about 30 "graduates" (former participants) to mark the occasion of the 40th anniversary of this festival. An ultimate goosebump moment for all listeners present in the main hall of the Shimane Civic Center.

The Toyota Youth Orchestra Camp (TYOC) was founded in 1985 by Motyashi Morishita and the Federation of Japan Amateur Orchestras Corp. (FJAO Corp.) with the support of Toyota Motor Corporation. The project aims to promote musical education and to give young artists the opportunity to perfect their skills under the guidance of experienced artists and teachers from several of Japan's top orchestras. One of the special features of this camp is that it is being organised by a steering group consisting of young members of the orchestra itself. These camps take place each year in a different location in Japan. In 2025 it will be Tokyo's turn.



Another purpose of TYOC is to prepare young people, at a local level, to be able to play in local orchestras and later on lead them. Attending the camp offers these young people a rare opportunity to make new friends and build future musical relationships by attending rehearsals, social gatherings and the magnificent opening and closing ceremonies, and of course by performing together in the final concert.

The camp consists of 2 sessions. The Japanese participants, delegates from amateur orchestras from all parts of the country, already had a first rehearsal block in 2023. This year, in addition, a limited number of musicians were invited from abroad, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and Singapore. Belgium was invited as a result of many years of close contacts between Alex Van Beveren (member of SG STT Vlamo) and Steven Hellemans (Chairman of SG STT Vlamo) and the World Federation of Amateur Orchestras (WFAO) which they are part of. Vlamo selected two participants to represent Belgium for the first time: Jana Mestdag, violin and Louise Smout, viola.



Jana

Being able to play Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony in Japan, at the age of 16, was a dream come true. It was an incredibly interesting experience to say the least. Not just musically but also socially and intellectually, I have grown enormously in just one week, thanks to the wonderful 120 members of the orchestra, David, Louise, and the experienced coaches and the flawless organisation. Japanese culture was something I had previously only seen and heard about but had never really experienced. Regardless of my expectations, it remained a huge shock to notice how things are handled in a completely different way on the other side of the globe. Japanese cuisine, punctuality and organisation skills, politeness and helpfulness, these are things I can learn so much from. Even if they cannot help you, Japanese people will always do everything they can to make you feel comfortable and at ease, and in our case they totally succeeded. In addition to the 3 days of intense rehearsals, Louise and I were fortunate enough to get a taste (both literally and figuratively speaking) of the beautiful Matsue. I had the incredible opportunity to receive lessons from fantastic violinists Masahiro Morita (principal second violins NHK Symphony Orchestra) and Akihiro Miura (Concertmaster Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra), an unforgettable learning experience! I would like to thank Vlamco for this wonderful opportunity, David and Louise for the great company during the trip, Joe Yamaji for the warm welcome and the rest of the TYOC team in Japan for providing us with unforgettable memories.

Louise

After a long flight we received a warm welcome in Matsue. It took some getting used to only hearing Japanese being spoken. On the first day, we did not understand much of the explanations during the rehearsals, but afterwards everything was being translated into English for us. The musicians were so understanding and helpful. Everything was being arranged down to the last detail. I met a lot of new people during this week and even made plans with some of them to meet again in the future. The camp ended on Saturday with a beautiful concert in which we played the Fifth Symphony by D. Shostakovich, Finlandia by J. Sibelius, I Vespri Siciliani by G. Verdi and a concerto for flute with a smaller ensemble. In Japan, team spirit is very important. To reinforce this feeling, we all sang a song together after the concert. We received the Japanese text with phonetic spelling, together with a translation into English so that we knew what the text meant:

“Wonderful moments will soon pass.
Now we are holding the time that left us.
We will never forget the joy of singing together.
The happy moments will not last forever.
Now we will miss each other after the departure.
We will never forget the time we have shared.”

A real goosebump moment. In addition to the many rehearsals, the organisers also made sure we have time to explore Matsue. We visited the castle, together with a group of musicians. At the very last moment we still managed to admire the beautiful Japanese cherry blossoms (Sakura). I am so happy and grateful to have been selected for this project and I continue to enjoy the memories of these wonderful musical days. Thank you Vlamo, Steven Hellemans, David Roelants and Jana Mestdag for this wonderful week.

Text and photographs: David Roelants, member SG STT Vlamo, Jana Mestdag and Louise Smout.

Further information about:

TYOC

2024:

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WFAO:

<https://wfao.net/>

FJAO:

<https://www.jao.or.jp/index.php>

VLAMO SG STT:

<https://www.vlamo.be/sg-strijk-toets-en-tokkelinstrumenten>