

## News from Japan

*A Japanese Tour by Nobuko Yuasa*

I produced a Japanese concert tour in May 2011, which was held in five cities from Fukuoka to Hamamatsu. As people know, we had serious earthquake and tsunami disasters on March 11 that year in the north part of Japan, which resulted in atomic reactor damage. Then, in the following months most concerts and entertainments were cancelled in the Tokyo area. Not just because the city was affected physically and the scarcity of electricity, but also the gloomy effect on people mentally, led them to stop running such events. However in the south west part of Japan people comparatively went on as usual, partly because they have different hertz supplies of electricity.

The tour project started with a request for shows at the All Japan Folk Dance Festival by the All-Japanese Federation of Folk Dancers. The festival has been held every five years in or close to Tokyo since 1956. One of the committee members had predicted a possible earthquake two years in advance, and they decided to put the venue in Fukuoka, south Japan. They had invited a Spanish dance team besides mine as the two main concerts. The team cancelled coming (as with most foreign performers at the time). All four hundred seats for our two times concerts were booked almost as soon as they were released eight months beforehand. The people who couldn't attend any concert were frustrated, and requested that the federation organized our third concert or that they use a larger room, although neither of these was possible.

Before Fukuoka, we had the first concert in my city Okayama. The Renaiss Hall is a restored old bank covered with Art Deco designed stone. I arranged wide wooden flooring boards for dancers & musicians and Coliseum style seats for the audience. Music was made by recorder, lute and guitar or second lute. The space was huge with a high roof and the floor was covered with carpet. I had been worrying about the acoustics but the wooden flooring on top acted as a sounding board and we got a perfect and beautiful sound effect!

The programme was to show a concise history of court dance alongside country dances. Fifteen dances altogether alternated English country dance and choreographed court dance starting in the Renaissance period and finishing in the Rococo era. Four dancers: Jeremy Badcock and me and Yuri & Hiro (who are modern dancers and learned court dance with me) used three to five costumes each. I made new costumes, and renewed other costumes. Jeremy and Diana Cruickshank helped me with these costumes.

It was one of the biggest concerts I have produced in my city over the last ten years. The costumes, dances and high-quality music invited the audience to experience a Western court. They enjoyed a world geographically and historically distant. When they left the hall many came to me and said they didn't want to go back to real life from this dream!

We moved to Fukuoka the next day and had a staff meeting on the stage. Then, the next morning, we arrived to see big acoustic facilities with several mikes having been set up on and beside the stage! I talked to the federation manager and the acoustic company cleared away the equipment, although they didn't look happy. The sound effect was good with the big wooden soundboards behind the musicians already set up as I had requested.

The federation has 20,000 members and 3000 came for the two-day festival. The staff, who are all folk dance teachers, the manager and the chairman looked so busy and happy. I myself was very happy to see so many dance people who filled the big convention centre, Marine Messe Fukuoka, gathered both on the

huge dance floor and crowding around the specialist shops in the foyers. Everyone was full of smiles and excitement.

Our two concerts got much involvement from the audience. Without any word I knew it easily. They clapped on the entrance and exit of each dance with sighs or cheering. Some stamped their feet trying to copy our steps of pas de bourée or menuet. Between our dances musicians played various tunes but the audience shared their impression with each other, and the MC shouted to stop it which was louder and adding to the general hubbub! Anyway they were all a good audience who knew how to enjoy a dance show heartily, which made us happier.

On the next day I gave a country dance workshop for 200 people. Everybody seemed to have much experience of learning with so many people. For example, when I talked or demonstrated with some dancers, those closer sat down to clear the view for those further away. It was a pleasant time to work with them and the learning went very well. I was thankful for their polite and warm attitude and it was a spectacle with so many people performing dances *'Twas within a Furlong of Edinburgh Toon* and *Last of Twenty* in the right manner.

Then we had a concert in Osaka with the other four musicians. They inserted Playford country dance tunes between dances for which they arranged about 50 tunes using many instruments. The concert was so delightful with the charming music. The hall is a 19th-century huge ballroom in the important national heritage building, Osaka Chuo Kokaido, which was restored to the original design. For example the fabric on the wall and curtains had been woven after the original pattern, and marble pillars, long chained hanging lights, exquisite ceiling design, etc, are so beautiful. It was the last concert for Yuri and Hiro and also the only one with these musicians.

Another concert was held in Nagoya at a small hall like a salon where a soprano sang for us and included a duet with Jeremy. Then we had one in Hamamatsu at the Instrument Museum. The museum has many Western early period instruments and Eastern ones. We danced on a small hexagon stage with full rows of seats set around us and against a backdrop of such marvellous instruments!

For the closing concert we came back to Nagoya. The Yamazaki Mazak Museum included our concert as one of their event series to celebrate their first anniversary. We used the main room for the concert. The style of the interior decoration is that seen in a Western 18th-century grand house and there are period paintings by artists such as Watteau on the deep red damask walls. Both the interior style and early 18th-century Western paintings are quite rare in Japan. The idea is to invite a visitor to a room which gives them the atmosphere of the Western world completely isolated from the outside of the museum. Our musician was Kenji Sano who played lute and guitar. His *Lachrimae* by John Dowland was so beautiful and made a great contrast with his lighthearted banter. The founder of the museum, Mr Yamazaki, with his family came to see our concert. Sadly he passed away a few months later in the summer.

(In addition they had planned for me to give a talk in July as one of the events. I talked on three themes: fashion, commedia characters and the rococo dance 'allemande' picking up from the figures on the paintings there. I enjoyed myself preparing for the talk. Many people, double the estimated number, came and the space was full of 160 chairs moved in from two rooms. After the talk I demonstrated dances at the beautiful entrance hall with my dancers and musicians from Nagoya. All the participants moved down there to surround us and their smiles showed they enjoyed it. The curator was so energetic and motivated and made the events quite attractive.)



These six venues concerts were each arranged by different organisers. I chose the main dances to suit the varied themes they wanted to focus on, adding other dances for each concert. As the musicians were different at most of the venues, devising the programmes and schedule for the rehearsals was complicated, but the preparation work inspired me and I gained energy from this. It was just fun to meet many people and to execute the tour with dancers, musicians and the concert staff. They supported me with their best efforts and the work they put into each concert. I'm so appreciative of them all.

Also I close this report with presenting huge thanks to Jeremy Badcock and Diana Cruickshank, who gave me constant support and advice, both practically and mentally.

Renaiss Hall [www.renaiss.or.jp](http://www.renaiss.or.jp)

Osaka Chuo Kokaido [osaka-chuokokaido.jp/index.php](http://osaka-chuokokaido.jp/index.php)

Hamamatsu Instruments Museum [www.gakkihaku.jp](http://www.gakkihaku.jp)

Yamazaki Mazak Museum of Art [www.mazak-art.com](http://www.mazak-art.com)



3 Nobuko dances baroque, Spanish style, with castanets (see pp. 6–7)

4 Nobuko and Jeremy enjoy a light-hearted baroque dance (see pp. 6–7)