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‘The Flower of Culture’
By HO GOKU

The first-ever Soka Gakkai culture festival is held. Shin’ichi Yamamoto believes that art should return to the people, and that culture festivals are one way to achieve this. ‘There is no other organization like ours in the world!’ he says. He criticizes politicians for not putting noble ideals into practice for the people as the Soka Gakkai has.

Another reason that Shin’ichi Yamamoto proposed the holding of music and culture festivals was because the arts must return to the people. The arts are the great spiritual treasures of all humankind.

Yet, at that time, only a small number of people in Japan attended classical music concerts or went to see the ballet or the traditional arts or visited art galleries. Part of the problem was that the Japanese people were not all that interested in the arts; another that those in the arts did not make sufficient efforts to reach out and bring their art to the people.

Shin’ichi viewed kosen-rufu as a cultural movement rooted in the lives of the people. Once, when asked by some young people what conditions would result from the spread of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings, he said, “Just to give an example from a cultural perspective, we might describe it as when ordinary, little old Japanese ladies are seen talking with ease about the works of Beethoven and Bach in their daily conversations.” Culture and art take on their true meaning when they are known and loved by the people. Without the participation and appreciation of the people, culture and art are empty, meaningless.

When people aspire to live with dignity, they find themselves turning naturally to art, appreciating beautiful music and fine paintings. Furthermore, when humanity and the human spirit triumph, they lead to a brilliant cultural flowering and the appearance from among the people of truly great artworks.

The Soka Gakkai’s first culture festival was divided into two parts. The first was held Oct. 14 at the Kyoritsu Auditorium in the Kanda area of Tokyo and the second Oct. 15 at the Yokohama Culture and Athletics Center. It combined the student festivals — featuring exhibits and theatrical, musical and choral performances organized by the student division — and the music festivals organized by the youth division, which had become regular events on the Gakkai calendar.

In addition, there were special guest performances by youth division leaders and Arts Department members. It was truly a celebration of a new humanistic culture.

When Shin’ichi arrived at the Kyoritsu Auditorium the evening of Oct. 14, he first viewed the paintings, calligraphy and photography exhibits presented by the student division on the second-floor lobby. Though the general level of the works may not have been particularly high, they were full of life and energy, and seemed to breathe with a fresh, creative vitality.

At 5:50 p.m., the culture festival got under way. It began with a light, enjoyable performance by the young women’s division harmonica ensemble, followed by a rendition of Beethoven’s Septet in E-flat Major, op. 20, by the student division, solo singing by arts division members and a choral performance by the White Lily Chorus of the women’s division.

Theatrical and dance performances followed. The young women's student division presented the Japanese classic comedy *Gargoyle*, and then Arts Department members presented traditional Japanese dance.

This was followed by the performance of an original play titled *Somewhere Today*, written and performed by members of the young men's student division. The play satirized the reality of corruption among local government officials through the story of a municipal assembly representative who had bought his election and the various money troubles he met with. The work reflected the student division's strong commitment to keep a sharp eye on the conduct of those in public office and to fight corruption and other abuses of power.

The climax of this first day of the culture festival was a showing of the film *Keep Trying, Dad!* produced by the Soka Gakkai News Bureau. The main character was a junior high school girl named Akiko, and the film told the story, with warmth and humor, of her father's struggle to spur himself to action based on faith. Portraying the situations and feelings many of the members experienced in daily life, it struck a deep chord with the audience and was enthusiastically received.

The News Bureau had been formed in May 1961 and, having launched a successful monthly newsreel, the "Seikyo News," had also embarked on producing dramatic films.

Faith is a drama of human revolution. At the same time, it transforms for the better the lives of families and creates new dramas of friendship and fellowship at work and in the community. This in turn contributes to the wider drama of making society and the world a better place. The staff of the News Bureau wanted to make films that would communicate this to viewers.

On the following day, Oct. 15, Shin'ichi attended the second part of the culture festival at the Yokohama Culture and Athletics Center. The program centered on musical performances, with the Brass Band debuting its first symphonic number, Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 ("Eroica"), op. 55. Following this was a performance by the Fife and Drum Corps, a debut by the YWD's Fuji Chorus, piano performances by Arts Department members, and a presentation by the Fuji Wind Ensemble. It was a night of music — and music of many kinds, including classical, Japanese folk songs and Soka Gakkai songs.

The finale of the evening was a choral rendition of the Gakkai's "Song of Renewal," accompanied by the Brass Band. The song had been written and composed by the young men's division and first introduced in March that year.

*How strong is the rushing tide!
The champions of kosen-rufu rise gallantly,
Holding aloft the banner of human happiness.
Stirring up a storm, young people gather.*

The audience began to sing along with the performers, their exuberant voices, 10,000 strong, reverberating powerfully through the hall.

Following the performances were speeches from several leaders. Shin'ichi Yamamoto then took the stage to address the audience:

"Just when you were feeling uplifted and inspired by the beautiful singing, the beautiful faces and beautiful melodies of the performers, you were confronted with the sober faces of leaders talking about doctrine, propagation and guidance. You have my deepest apologies.

"But please don't worry. I've asked the youth division chief to do away with closing speeches and addresses at all future music festivals!"

Shin'ichi's easygoing humor drew a roar of laughter from the crowd.

“On my way here from Tokyo,” he went on, “I was reading Sohachi Yamaoka’s historical novel *Takasugi Shinsaku*, now being serialized in the *Seikyo Shimbun*.

“There is a scene in which Yoshida Shoin, the great educator and reformer under whom Takasugi studied, comes to realize one of life’s most important truths while imprisoned during the Ansei Purge [of political leaders and court nobles who opposed the Tokugawa shogunate, 1858–60]. ‘Even the grandest vision,’ he declares, ‘is worth less than a bowl of broth unless it is rooted in reality and put into practice.’

“In other words, the loftiest ideal is worthless, meaningless, unless grounded in people’s lives, unless there are those willing to risk their lives to practice and realize that ideal.

“In Japan since the war, leaders and politicians have been voicing many ideals and acting as if they are friends to the people. But have they not failed to make even a single of those ideals a reality? These days we hear the government touting the need to ‘develop the people’ and ‘build the nation,’ but aren’t those things normally the responsibility and duty of government? The fact that those in power feel compelled to say such things shows that they have been doing nothing until now.

“In contrast, the Soka Gakkai cherishes the supreme life-philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin. Based on that philosophy, we are working for the noble goal of realizing world peace and happiness for all. So far, we have helped almost 3 million households genuinely overcome their suffering and find fulfillment. We have reached out to the sick, some who have been abandoned even by their doctors and have lost all hope or will to live. We have reached out to people so deeply depressed and frustrated as to have contemplated suicide. And through tenacious dialogue and encouragement, we have helped them find hope and strength to go on living.

“We have worked day and night for the happiness of suffering individuals and for all people.

“I can therefore proudly declare for all to hear that the Soka Gakkai is an organization that champions the highest ideals and upholds an unrivaled philosophy. Its members have always worked and lived among the people and stood on the side of the people, becoming their staunchest ally. There is no other organization like ours in the world!”

Shin’ichi’s words elicited an explosion of applause. Waiting until it ended, he continued:

“This wonderful, joyous, entertaining culture festival has come about through the power of the people, and I am convinced that it clearly demonstrates the triumph of the human spirit.

“While violence and war are threats to our existence, the arts express the joy of life. Wherever the correct Buddhist teachings spread, there will be jubilant poetry, song and dance. Joy is sublimated into art.

“As a result, wherever we who practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism go, splendid flowers of art will bloom. Our mission is to link people’s hearts with this blossoming of life’s joy and to create a beautiful garden of peace on earth.

“In closing, I thank all of you very much for allowing me and the other Soka Gakkai Board of Directors to view and enjoy your enthusiastic performances. On behalf of the board members, and as an expression of our appreciation, I’ll lead you in one of our Soka Gakkai songs.” His proposal was greeted by ecstatic cheers and applause.

To the opening strains of “Song of the New Century,” everyone in the audience began to clap resoundingly in time with the music. Shin’ichi led the song with all the grace and strength of a mighty eagle soaring through the sky.

The members sang with more passion and joy than in any other of the festival’s performances. Their voices and hearts were completely in time with Shin’ichi’s vigorous

movements.

For the Soka Gakkai, that day marked a fresh departure on a journey across the vast sea of life toward the destinations of peace and culture.

Eight days after the culture festival, the world was rocked by news from the United States of an event that threatened the survival of the human race. President John F. Kennedy made a special address to his nation, broadcast from the White House by television and radio at 7:00 p.m., Oct. 22. On screen, his face appeared pale and drawn; he spoke slowly and forcefully, placing grave emphasis on each word: "This government, as promised, has maintained the closest surveillance of the Soviet military build-up on the island of Cuba. Within the past week unmistakable evidence has established the fact that a series of offensive missile sites is now in preparation on that imprisoned island."

To be continued