

DIALOGUE ON ART AND LIFE WE MUST OPEN OUR LIVES

In a dialogue with SGI-USA member and jazz superstar Herbie Hancock, SGI President Ikeda explains how 'Buddhism teaches that we must open our lives. The essence of art, life and Buddhism is the same.'

SGI President Ikeda: Congratulations on your latest Grammy Awards! SGI members throughout the world applaud you.

I am well aware of all your achievements so far. You are the emperor of music, the king of music! I am so delighted to see you. Mrs. Hancock, I am very happy to see you, as well.

Herbie Hancock: I am the one who is overjoyed to have this opportunity to meet with you, President Ikeda! I want to present you with the CD for which I was awarded. I was extra careful so it wouldn't break in transit!

Mr. Hancock wrote the following inscription on the CD jacket: "Dear President Ikeda, it is through being inspired by your courage and winning spirit that I was able to create the music on this record. I will continue to strive to reply to you, my mentor in life. Thank you, Herbie Hancock." The CD is titled Gershwin's World, and features recomposed and reconstructed arrangements of works by American composer George Gershwin; it was produced in commemoration of the centennial of Gershwin's birth last year.

Ikeda: I was very impressed by your words that the performer's stage is like a surgeon's operating table — it is a life-or-death struggle.

Hancock: Yes, I did say that.

Ikeda: These are the words of a first-rate individual. They apply to all fields of endeavor. By the way, I listened to your award-winning album *Gershwin's World*.

Hancock: Really? I can't believe it!

Ikeda: It's true. My wife is my witness.

Hancock: Nothing could make me happier!

Ikeda: I am just an amateur, but I thought it was fantastic. I was surprised at just how great it is, and I was deeply impressed.

Hancock: Thank you very much. But you are not an amateur — I have heard you play the piano, and I can say that music is another field in which you are highly gifted!

Ikeda: I hope they don't put that in the newspaper! What were you thinking about while you were producing *Gershwin's World*?

Hancock: There are many songs on the album, and I wanted each one to be different and to have its own identity. I also wanted the album itself to have its own identity. There have already been a number of albums paying tribute to Gershwin, and it was my goal to create something unique, a whole new musical environment based on the essence of each piece.

Ikeda: Such a challenging spirit is the key!

Hancock: That's what I learnt from you, President Ikeda: Courage. Creativity. You are constantly encouraging all SGI members to be creative, to live our lives with creativity.

I was determined this time that I would make a truly original album, and I challenged myself on many different levels to achieve that goal. Toward that, I needed to awaken something within my own life. In my experience, the only way to release my inner creativity is to continuously go back to the Gohonzon. There is no other way. I firmly believe this.

Ikeda: I am very moved by your words. Buddhism teaches that we must open our lives. The essence of art, life and Buddhism is the same.

Mr. Hancock has attracted attention in the jazz world since the 1960s. He became an instant success with the release of his first album, Takin' Off, in 1962. The following year he joined the renowned Miles Davis Band. In 1973, he created the now-legendary band Headhunters. His fusion of rock and jazz has had an unprecedented impact on popular music. In 1976, he formed a new band, V.S.O.P., with Wayne Shorter (another SGI-USA member) and others, which toured worldwide. A classical pianist as well as a revolutionary jazz artist, Mr. Hancock has received numerous accolades besides his Grammys, including an Academy Award in 1987 for the original score to the motion picture Round Midnight.

Ikeda: In 1997, you received a Grammy Award for the album *Manhattan*, along with your late sister, Jean. I was so sorry to hear that Jean died in an airplane accident. I pray for her repose from the bottom of my heart.

Last year, you came to Japan with the reconstituted Headhunters. It was in 1963 that your song "Watermelon Man," from your debut album, became a huge hit, wasn't it?

Hancock: Yes, that's right.

Ikeda: How did that album come about?

Hancock: I was 22 then. It was my first album under my own name. Someone had suggested that half of the record be comprised of songs that people were familiar with, so that it would have a better chance of selling. The other half, he said, could be original.

I thought, however, that maybe I could write something totally original that was still catchy enough to sell the record. I wanted more than anything to honestly, sincerely convey my own experience. And things turned out exactly as I had hoped!

Ikeda: Not only are you a great artist, you are also a great human being! It is often said

that artists in the entertainment business in Japan lack strict discipline and training these days. They do not struggle painstakingly to challenge themselves as artists.

By the way, Happy Birthday! [April 12 was Mr. Hancock's birthday.]

Hancock: Thank you!

Ikeda: Don't worry, I won't disclose your age!

Gigi Hancock: You are welcome to give away his age, as long as you don't reveal mine!

Ikeda: I heard that he just turned 59. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher stated [in her resignation speech] that life begins at 65. From my experience, too, I can honestly say that life begins in one's 60s.

Hancock: In that case, my life is just beginning! I have such hope! There is so much to look forward to!

Ikeda: In youth, we have immense freedom and are filled with hope for the future. But in our 60s, we possess the wonderful treasure of life experience. Each golden day of our 60s is spent utilizing this treasure, as we adorn our life in its third stage. This applies to the realms of art, study and life itself.

Hancock: That's fantastic! Your words are so inspiring! I have always viewed my life in decades. My 30s were better than my 20s, and my 40s better than my 30s. But whenever I would think about turning 60, I couldn't help but feel that things would be downhill from there. I couldn't imagine what I would do, what I could hope for. I am therefore very grateful for your encouragement.

Ikeda: Nichiren Daishonin writes, "You will grow younger, and your good fortune will accumulate" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 158). Those who practice this Buddhism actually become younger, their lives overflowing with vitality and radiating with beauty. The principles of perennial youth and eternal life are the essence of Buddhism.

Hancock: It is certainly true that the longer I practice Buddhism, the younger I feel. I genuinely feel like a youth again. [Mr. Hancock joined the SGI in 1972.]

Ikeda: You are living in accord with the Gosho. What's more, this youthful life never dies. The life and artistic spirit you have forged will continue forever. This is the principle of the inseparability of life and death.

Incidentally, I heard that you have said you are very proud of your mother for her courage in battling discrimination. [Herbie's mother, Winnie, was born and raised in Georgia, where racism was rampant.] She got married at a time when African Americans didn't have much hope for the future. People had lost all confidence, families were plagued by discord and violence, and juvenile delinquency and drug abuse prevailed. However, your mother had great dreams and a vision for the future. She was determined to change her life, to give it meaning and to provide her children with the opportunity to

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do the same.

Hancock: That is correct. She is a wonderful mother.

Ikeda: I understand that it was also your mother who made sure you got a piano when you were a boy. You were constantly playing the piano at your friend's house and, realizing that you had an interest, she persuaded your father to purchase a piano for you, despite the financial hardship. The piano arrived on your seventh birthday.

Hancock: That's exactly how it happened!

Ikeda: She also managed to save enough money to send three children to college.

Hancock: That's true. I don't know how she did it. It really seems like a miracle. She really struggled to provide for us.

Ikeda: I hear that your parents are well and residing in Chicago.

Hancock: Yes, they are fine, although they have become a little weaker with age.

Ikeda: They must be filled with joy to see you doing so well. It is only natural that we slow down in our old age. But your mother continues to do gongyo. That is great! Without a doubt, she will possess sharp faculties and boundless fortune in her next life, too.

Hancock: Thank you so much!

Ikeda: There is something I want to say to you, as your friend and as a huge fan: To win in the end is to achieve ultimate victory. True victory is to continue to struggle and score victories until the very end of your life. Your life is beginning now. Your true battle starts from today.

Hancock: Thank you. Your words penetrate my being. They are very significant to me at this time. I feel as though I am entering a new phase of my life. I am still growing. I am in the process of development.

Ikeda: "New phase of life" — what a great expression. Human beings have two choices: to fall into apathy and face deadlock or to continue striving upward, challenging higher mountains.

Fame is not everlasting. And, the farther up the mountain we climb, the narrower the road becomes. It can get slippery, and some may even plummet downward. So we must proceed with caution. We practice faith so that we will win in the end. This applies to art and life.

Hancock: Reflecting on my life, I see that there have been many stages. I have practiced Buddhism for a number of years, but I feel that I am now starting again from the basics. I have reached a point where I need to dig deeper into my life. I feel as though I am grasping to find my core, my relationship with the world and life around me. It is dif-

difficult to explain, but I feel that I am beginning again.

Ikeda: That is very admirable and respectable.

Hancock: Thank you very much for your incredible encouragement, President Ikeda. I am a member of Canyon District in Los Angeles, and the members there asked me to convey their best regards to you. I am going to report to them immediately about our wonderful meeting today. They will be thrilled.

Ikeda: Please give each and every one of them my warmest regards. To live as you are, sharing your life with your fellow members, is noble. We who are dedicated to working for others, for the Mystic Law, for ourselves, for our ancestors and descendants, are living lives of ultimate value. There is no life greater than this.

Hancock: I will never forget this time we have spent together. It will be a golden memory! Thank you!

President Ikeda presented Mr. and Mrs. Hancock with the photo album, Memorable Encounters, writing in it, "Music of a Great King, Melodies of a Victor in Life."