

Introducing the Hamamatsu Museum of Musical Instruments

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The Hamamatsu Museum of Musical Instruments, which opened its doors in 1995 (Heisei 7) as the first publicly established musical instrument museum in Japan, is a rarity even among the musical instrument museums of the world in that its work goes far beyond the normal museum work of collecting, storing, repairing, documenting, and exhibiting musical instruments, disseminating a multiplicity of information about the variety and depth of musical culture through many different media such as CDs, DVDs, and written documentation, and events such as lecture concerts, evening salons, historical and cultural courses, workshops, traveling exhibits, and monographs. The collection of musical instruments, which numbered 700 items when the museum opened, has also expanded to 3,300 items at present, of which 1,300 are on permanent display. The policy of the museum is “to breathe life into the instruments, and to create a living museum.” The committee for the Koizumi Fumio Prize for Ethnomusicology has praised the museum highly for vigorously realizing this policy along with its growing roster of varied activities.

Musical instrument museums first appeared in Europe in the 19th century, but the core of their collections consisted of European instruments, and non-European instruments were marginalized within the framework of ethnic or folk instruments. One could say that viewpoint reflected the thinking of comparative musicology in its early stages. At musical instrument museums in non-European regions as well, the instruments on display were primarily those of that country where it was located and of its own people, and the collections of other cultures’ instruments were markedly inferior. In other words, in their curatorial policies there was an intrinsic bias in favor of their own country and their own culture. The Hamamatsu Museum of Musical Instruments tries hard to separate itself from that existing trend, and operating from an anthropological awareness tries as much as possible to treat all musical cultures equally from a relativistic viewpoint, whether it be the local culture or an unfamiliar one. This is a perspective that says all instruments have an equal value as cultural products, whether they are complex instruments made from thousands of parts or ones made from a single shaft of bamboo. The Hamamatsu Museum of Musical Instruments is to be praised for being the first musical instrument museum in the world to have such a perspective.

However, in order to do that, it is necessary to explain the cosmic view, the religion, the technology, the natural environment, etc. that are behind each of the instruments. In response to this need, a variety of outreach activities such as concerts and workshops,

lecture courses, and CDs and DVDs have come into being one after another. Insofar as the museum has used musical instruments as a starting point for widening our view of culture and economy, and further of the world and the environment, leading to a grand narrative, its reason for being and its profundity are being recognized. It is no exaggeration to say that the museum itself is a kind of ‘universe.’

While the whole roster of the museum’s varied activities has been acclaimed by society, among those it is especially noteworthy that the Collection Series No. 38 CD, “English Sonatas on the Broadwood Piano– Sounds for a New Century” was awarded the recording category prize from the Agency for Cultural Affairs’ Arts Festival in 2012 (Heisei 24). Being performed on a fortepiano manufactured in 1802 brought a fresh incandescence to works by Dussek, Beethoven, and others. This was a cultural adventure for a museum, akin to walking on two legs if looked at from a business perspective. Additionally, Museum Director SHIMA Kazuhiko’s report of the museum’s research received the Japanese Association of Museums’ Incentive Award in 2014, and the museum has been showered with much attention both in Japan and abroad, being invited to make presentations at the 2013 ‘The Best in Heritage Meeting’ in Dubrovnik and the 2014 conference of the International Council of Museums and Collections of Musical Instruments (CIMCIM) in Stockholm and elsewhere.

The fact that based on its storehouse as a museum, at the same time as exhibiting the material culture of musical instruments, it has made free use of a very wide array of channels and media to shed light on the characteristics of the music of the world’s varied peoples as spiritual culture as well, and has continued to always provide stimulus for the ordinary citizens, the specialists, and the researchers who come to visit, makes it indeed worthy to receive the Koizumi Fumio Prize for Ethnomusicology. And in the formation of that substantial program, the contributions made by Museum Director Shima Kazuhiko and his capable staff, and by Hamamatsu City which established the museum, should be seen as enormous.

A Brief History of the Hamamatsu Museum of Musical Instruments

1995

Opening special exhibition, “Bamboo and Gourd Musical Instruments”

1996

Opening of the exhibition room for Asian and African instruments

1997

Guided tours for exhibition rooms begin

1999

Museum of musical instruments on PC, and Internet website on line

2000

Museum visits for elementary schools in the city begin

The special exhibition for the 5th anniversary, “The birth of musical instruments!”

500,000 visitors

2001

The 1st practical workshop with Javanese gamelan

2002

Museum Members’ Club begins

2003

The 11th special exhibition, “Musical Instruments and the 20th Century”

2006

Special exhibition, “The fine string instruments of Osaka College of Music’s Suntory Collection”

2007

1,000,000 visitors

2008

Evening salon concerts begin

2010

15th anniversary special event “Thumb Piano Festival”

2011

Special exhibition “Symphony of Dolls”

2012

Special exhibition “Archeology of Musical Instruments, Sound-Journey to Ancient Era”

Participate in the International meeting of Laon-laon (Taipei)

1,500,000 visitors

2013

Grand Prize in the Recording Category from the Agency for Cultural Affairs’ Arts Festival, 2012, for the collection series CD No.38 “English Sonata on the Broadwood Piano”

Participate in ‘The Best in Heritage Meeting’ (Dubrovnik, Croatia)

2014

Gallery Talks begin

Special exhibition “The World of Bagpipes”

Participate in CIMCIM annual meeting (Nordic Countries)

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