

Messages from the artists in overseas:

To dearest Japanese audience,

I am feeling anxious to hear that there are still many people suffering the difficulty in everyday life even after three months from the great earthquake. I would imagine if I could go and sing in front of the people there. It must be ideal if I could do that, but very pity it is not possible in my schedule this time.

Some of the people around me in Berlin concerned with my visit to Japan in this period. However, I myself definitely thought that I should go to Japan and sing there in its hardest time, because this country had done quite a lot to me. I was thinking that I must deliver my gratitude to my audience in Japan, in reply to their great applauses and kindnesses they gave me so far. Now I am honestly eager to send my message – with solidarity and deepest sympathy – “I am always with you.”

Jochen Kowalski, countertenor

Die Fledermaus from Hyogo

Yutaka Sado, who debuted in the Berlin Philharmonic's subscription concert in May, conducted the new production of Die Fledermaus, directed by Isao Hirowatari, at Hyogo Performing Arts Center, where he serves as the artistic director. All the eight performances was sold out. The Hyogo-based production finished in a tremendous success with the sensational staging by Hirowatari and the talented and characteristic cast, to follow the previous success with The Merry Widow by the same company three years before.

Is it rude to compare the grand hall of art and culture to an entertainment park?

Hyogo Performing Arts Center is filled with the people from Kobe and Osaka every day, even after five years from its establishment in October 2005. Its sensational production of The Merry Widow in 2008 attracted exceptionally great number of audience in twelve performances in total. It was a mixture of the most popular amusement attractions – opera, revue, ballet and even with Zakoba Katsura from the traditional comic performing art.

Johann Strauss' Die Fledermaus, made by the same creative team after three years, again finished the ticket sales of all the eight performances.

On the stage, there are three levels of champagne glasses, three-meters high each, which provides an enormously great impression over the audience. There is a walkway, in

Takarazuka style, between the orchestra pit and the auditorium, through which the singers can come close out to the public. At the back, you will see a beautiful image of the sunset during Czardas, or gorgeous series of fireworks. Even the scene changes are carefully staged in waltz and polkas with the dancers. It was a “roller coaster opera.” No one can take his eyes and ears off from it.

In the backstage, the production crew observes the audience with cool, but graceful glance. Both Yutaka Sado, who came back from Berlin Philharmonic, and Isao Hirowatari, the impresario with 50 years of career in this business with La Scala or Wiener Staatsoper, pay a great attention delicately to the audience’s feeling of excitement and sympathy.

Interview: Jochen Kowalski on his last Orlofsky

by Kei Yoshimura, music journalist

The Prince in Sado-Hirowatari production of Die Fledermaus was Jochen Kowalski, who came to Japan only for this production. Smiling all the time, he talked over this production, which he described as the last and the best Fledermaus for him.

Jochen Kowalski: The Fledermaus at Hyogo Performing Arts Center was the last occasion for me to play the role of Prince Orlofsky. It was a wonderful production. All the people was so kind that they didn’t want the production to be finished. In the last performance, I noticed Maestro Sado weeping during the music and I tried not to see his face – if I did, I knew I was going to be moved and could not sing any more... I assure Maestro Sado is one of the best Fledermaus conductor I ever performed together with. In Germany, there is a saying “One should quit at his best.” It has been 24 years since I played this role for the first time at the Volksoper Wien, and I had wonderful opportunities to play it at the Wiener Staastoper, in Berlin, and the rest of the world including Tokyo. Now I feel very glad and happy that I started the role with the best production and finished it with another best production.

When I played the Prince in another production a little while ago, which was not actually so satisfactory, I thought I should quit the role with it. However, when Mr. Hirowatari offered me the role full of interesting ideas, I decided to accept his enthusiastic invitation and to try to do it just once again. Now I realize I took the best way. I enjoyed it very much. I will never forget my lines in Japanese, “Kaketsuke Sambai!” (The late comer must finish three glasses.), for example. The relationship with

Japanese singers was very well from the beginning. Mr. Zakoba Katsura taught me a lot of “Omoroi” (funny) Japanese wordings in Kansai dialect which made the audience laugh. I dressed in the costume of Ludwig the 2nd, King of Bavaria, whom I was interested in from my childhood, and was allowed to act rather with my own ideas. Well, but ... everything is over now. Time flies like an arrow. It’s so fast. My activity is, of course, still full of plans. I am singing Bach with five top Jazz musicians in Berlin, or Russian art songs in a theater piece. Also, there is a concert project called “Café Europa” in which I perform with the artists from the Staatsoper Berlin, to introduce café music in Europe in the flame of travels (can be seen in YouTube). One of the publishers in Berlin is offering me to write an autobiography. I think I need some more time to do that, because it is a little bit dangerous, ha ha. It’s sometimes rather difficult to speak the truth, you know. I don’t want to be an Eisenstein, who has to ask for a lawyer like Dr. Blind!

Concert Reviews

Hyogo Performing Arts Center: Die Fledermaus

By Yoshihiko Kusakabe

It was an extraordinarily joyful operetta production. The success should mostly be attributed to Isao Hirowatari’s stage direction. There was a great improvement in Hirowatari’s style, compared with the previous production of Merry Widow. There is no useless gap in his direction, as the result of his long career in the show business. The production has its own flow, which never stops and just attracts the Kansai audience: the pyramid of big champagne glasses quickly changes into a prison office; singers and actors often comes of the proscenium onto the apron stage to play close in front of the audience, and so on.

I saw the second cast, which was consisted with the most talented actor-singers. Noriko Sasaki as Rosalinde, Teruhiko Komori as Eisenstein, Sara Kobayashi as Adele, Iwao Onuki as Alfred. All of them were also very good at singing. Zakoba Katsura as Frosch played in a typical style of traditional comedy of Osaka, which made the audience into a great burst. It was also impressive that those comic factors never go too much into a shallow slap stick but still kept a good taste of operetta. It was a prime opportunity to listen to Jochen Kowalski sang Prince Orlofsky with his never-declining countertenor voice. Werner Hink, ex-concertmaster of the Vienna Philahrmonic, joined the Hyogo

Performing Arts Center Orchestra as the guest concertmaster, who played the solo violin in “Wien, du Stadt meiner Träume.” It was the sixth performance. (22nd July 2011)