

TOKYO AS SEEN BY ARTISTS

SHEENA RINGO

Tokyo as a city of culture

Sheena Ringo Musician

Following her debut in 1998, she was active in the band Tokyo Jihen from 2004 to 2012. Besides composing music for cinema and theater, she also writes songs for other artists and engages in music arrangement and production. She won a Japan Academy Prize for outstanding achievement in music and a newcomer award from the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology for promoting the arts.

At the prestigious Prix de Lausanne and other major events long dominated by Western performers, lately some brilliant young artists from Japan have come to the fore. The world is no longer surprised to see the high level of skills shown by the Japanese in dance and musical performances. Centering on this reality, what I am picturing in my mind is Tokyo as a metropolis that can properly appreciate the value of a life that has been blessed with a rich education. The city really needs to provide platforms for young performers to fully demonstrate the skills they have gained through arduous practice since early childhood, as another option to becoming top-flight members of leading dance troupes or orchestras abroad. When you consider that there's a lot of talk of having Shibuya crossing become like Times Square in the eyes of the world, this is even more necessary. That's because Tokyo is teeming with world-class talent.



Photo credit: "Sheena Ringo" NHK

YOKOI KOUEN

The spirit of hospitality to be passed down for the next 100 years

Yokoi Kouen Flower arrangement artist

Born into a family of Sogetsu Ikebana Japanese flower arrangement artists, following in the footsteps of her mother and grandmother, she is a graduate of Musashino Art University. Has also directed arrangements for Noh stage and film, and was chosen as one of the world's 27 leading flower artists in 2007. She has opened flower arrangement classrooms in and around Tokyo.



Japan, with its distinctive seasons, carries on the wisdom of our ancestors, whose appreciation of flowers and plants became part of our culture and customs. When Scottish plant hunter Robert Fortune visited Edo (former name of Tokyo) in the mid 19th century, he noted that an innate love for flowers is a strong part of the Japanese national character. People decorate pine trees with bitter oranges, whose name in Japanese suggests continued prosperity over coming generations. The custom of decorating evergreen pine trees arose because people are aware of falling leaves. Visitors from abroad must have been surprised to see people admiring plants placed in some corner of a lane.

Even after Edo became Tokyo, decorating alcoves, tea rooms, rock gardens and other spaces with potted plants and flower arrangements are practices that continue to this day. This is a national trait of which we can be proud. With so many visitors coming to Tokyo, it would be nice if we could show them the spirit of hospitality through flowers and plants. My wish is for the customs passed down since the end of the Edo period to still be here to greet people a hundred years from now.

Photo credit: "Noh" (third from top on the left) ©The Nohgaku Performers' Association

