

Becoming One with the Music, She Reaches Out to Audiences' Hearts

Studying abroad was what really ignited OKISAWA Nodoka's desire to pursue a career in music. Now, having earned high acclaim at international competitions, she talks about what is most important about standing on the rostrum, and the best part of getting to "weave sounds" together with an orchestra.



At the Tokyo International Music Competition for Conducting in 2018, Okisawa garnered rave reviews for her direction of a piece by Mendelssohn that had been assigned to all the competitors.

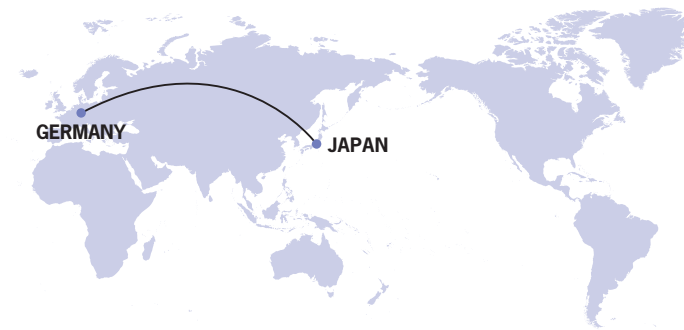
In September 2019, a piece of news spread throughout the world of classical music: OKISAWA Nodoka had won the *Grand Prix de Direction* at the International Competition for Young Conductors of Besançon, known as a major gateway to success for young conductors. As only the second Japanese woman

ever to win the prized award, she also had the distinction of winning the special awards for being the "Orchestra's Favorite" and the "Audience's Favorite."

Okisawa grew up in Aomori Prefecture, where she took lessons in the piano, cello and oboe. With that background, she first decided to

pursue a career in conducting while in the winter of her second year of high school, when she was visiting Sydney on a language-learning program.

"It was such an extreme contrast, having left Aomori in mid-winter and arriving in Sydney during the peak of summer. Getting exposed



to a wide variety of perspectives prompted me to ask myself anew what I really wanted to do. That was when I decided to pursue a career in music rather than simply making it a hobby. I was good at solfège, which requires an above-average ability to read music, so I thought that conducting would be a good challenge for me."

From then on, Okisawa pursued her studies with extra drive and determination, entering Tokyo University of the Arts, where she majored in conducting, and where she could develop her talents further while being faced with a variety of challenges. After graduating from the university, she studied at the Hanns Eisler School of Music Berlin. She gained additional experience as an assistant conductor in the Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa for one and a half years, starting in autumn 2011. There, she received tutelage from numerous maestros, including INOUE Michiyoshi.

She continues, "The most important thing in conducting is

to let go of your negative thoughts and become one with the music. During rehearsal, the orchestra lets you experience unique things that are invisible and unimaginable simply by reading the score. I find the process so interesting: first, you create music by exchanging ideas and working together with the orchestra, and then you share it with audiences around the world."

In 2018, Okisawa took first prize at the Tokyo International Music Competition for Conducting, the most prestigious competition for aspiring conductors in Asia. In the spring of the following year, she studied under Riccardo Muti at his Italian opera academy in Tokyo.

"From Maestro Muti, I learned the importance of the connection between words and sound in opera. I also learned to 'be myself' while standing on the rostrum, and not let my lack of experience scare me."

Okisawa is currently based in Berlin. While working with various orchestras worldwide, she is also gaining valuable experience as an



OKISAWA Nodoka

A Japanese-born conductor based in Berlin. The winner of the 56th International Competition for Young Conductors of Besançon in 2019 and the 18th Tokyo International Music Competition for Conducting in 2018.

assistant to the chief conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, Kirill Petrenko. In November 2020, she plans to direct a performance in Tokyo of the operetta *The Merry Widow*, the pandemic permitting.

"In addition to opera performances, I would also like to focus my efforts on kids' concerts and conducting youth orchestras, as I learned so much from participating in them in my own youth."

In opera, Okisawa says that she is keen to try her hand at directing a work of Verdi's or Mozart's, such as *The Marriage of Figaro* or *The Magic Flute*. Music aficionados can only wait with anticipation the music she will weave in the future. ✿



In Leipzig, Germany, Okisawa took part in a master class by the late Kurt Masur, one of the conductors whom she admires and respects the most. Masur died in 2015.



Scene from the award ceremony for the 2019 International Competition for Young Conductors of Besançon. It was the first time in eight years for a Japanese conductor to win the prize.