



## Tokyo Sinfonia Symphonies for Strings

### Press Conference Script

#### Introduction

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I am pleased to welcome you to this introduction of Tokyo Sinfonia's most important concert series – the *Symphonies for Strings* to be presented in Oji Hall from March this year.

#### Maestro Ryker

Classical music in Japan is technically superb but somewhat forbidding.

When he first came to Japan, Robert Ryker, a true Renaissance Man, saw the opportunity to bring warmth and enjoyment to all involved in top class professional classical performances.

He has an exciting approach to the three fundamentals of music:

*The players:* Robert cherishes his musicians, wants them to enjoy themselves whilst at the same time demanding top professionalism. His re-scoring provides that each musician is a soloist, not merely a cog in a musical machine. He is renowned as a builder of orchestras, and his vision is transmitted through the players to the audience. He has developed the richly textured 19 piece chamber orchestra into a virtually new musical instrument to turn the notes into music through technique – expression – interpretation – charisma.

*The repertoire:* through re-scoring important masterworks to give them new life and develop the string orchestra as a virtually new musical instrument.

*The audience:* Maestro Ryker's warm and approachable style to music makes every performance a joyous experience and a highly professional event for audience and orchestra alike. Specifically through several distinct programme streams:

- The “hugely enjoyable” series of dinner-concert Serenades at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (Yurakucho), featuring delicious food interspersed with delightful music coordinated around a national theme. This is suitable for newcomers to the classical music scene as well as being a favourite of old hands.
- The classic series' of Symphonies for Strings and Concertos for Strings champagne concerts in Ginza's outstanding Oji Hall, featuring magnificent works rarely heard in the concert hall ingeniously re-scored to add a new dimension of texturing and layering of the sound of the orchestra. These are our top level concert series appealing to aficionados as well as to novices.
- Special events – such as the annual Mozart Birthday Serenade, the Summer Serenade in the Great Hall of the Russian Embassy, and British Chamber Anniversary Serenade performances.
- Sinfonia in the Schools programmes – developed for the USA Education Board, are very popular.



## His Philosophy

### **Sound is the starting point of music**

Sound is the starting point of music. When he conceived of the Tokyo Sinfonia, Maestro Ryker wanted to create an orchestra with the richest sound possible with economy of means. As the Americans say, he wanted to create an orchestra delivering the most bang for the buck. To achieve this, he relied on two well-established concepts of dynamics.

From management theory, he took the definition of group dynamics. The largest group in which the individual typically feels that he makes a distinctive personal contribution is five (above that, the group tends to break down into an executive core and outer circle). Maestro wanted every player to feel that he as an individual is vital, critical to the orchestra, hence he determined that the largest sections should comprise exactly 5 players each.

From harmonic theory, he took the physical definition of harmony,. Overtones derive from the fundamental of the bass. As the bass is the central to the structure of sound, it is best centred in the ensemble, with the upper sections balanced on each side.

Seating the first and second violin sections on each side requires an testimony of faith in the competence of the players in the second violin section. For centuries, less skilled players have been routinely relegated to the second violin section, which played safely adjacent and in the shadow of the firsts. But this does not allow the second violin section to be heard on its own, and it does not offer a balanced sound continuum. So-called opera seating does both of these things, but it challenges these players especially to be the musical equal of their colleagues across the way. Maestro has chosen this way, and he is enormously proud of our second violin players.

Seating the violas and violoncellos was the next consideration. After much reflection, Maestro chose to seat the viola section on his left, next to the first violins. Toscanini did this. The tone of the violas bridges the tones of the lower and upper strings to fuse the sound of the entire ensemble into one seamless whole. Seated where their f-holes face the audience, like the first violins, the violas are in the most favourable position to be heard. Moreover, he conceived that the viola tone warms the sound of the first violins, while the violoncello tone warms the sound of the second violins.

The sizes of the sections are precisely proportioned for equally specific reasons -- 5 first violins, 5 second violins, 4 violas, 3 violoncellos, and 2 contrabasses. It's all a question of balance. If the sections are balanced, the harmonic partials will fall naturally into tune. If the partials are in tune, the chords will ring. If the chords ring, the tone will become beautiful, And if the tone is beautiful, surely the orchestra will become famous.

When he first rehearsed the Tokyo Sinfonia in its 19-member configuration, Maestro realised that he did not want the inner circle to be large, as it must be for a symphony orchestra, but intimate like a string quartet. He therefore asked the principal players to sit as a quartet, on separate stands, linking and



representing their sections. This has worked very well for us, and the seating has become a hallmark of the Tokyo Sinfonia.

Maestro Ryker treasures each player. As Roger Brookin has observed, in the Tokyo Sinfonia each player is a soloist.

If the orchestra has a beautiful sound, then it should also have an exciting repertoire to present itself with. But the reality is that from the time wind instruments were added to the orchestra to give it instrumental colour and dramatic character, the string orchestra has not been in the focus of the composer's craft. There are many, many concertos, sonatas, quartets, symphonies and tone poems in the popular repertoire. These are the major building blocks (works of half an hour or more), around a credible concert programme can be planned. But is there anyone in this room who can name even ten 30-minute works for string orchestra?

Recognising the dearth of great masterworks in the string orchestra repertoire, Maestro wondered if there were major works in the chamber repertoire which might be re-scored for the string orchestra. There were several precedents: Schönberg's *Transfigured Night*, Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*, which Mahler had thought to set, and Britten's *Simple Symphony*, originally a quartet.

He imagined that Bruckner's predilection for blocks of sound might offer a fertile source. Indeed, upon investigation he discovered a great and absolutely neglected work of massive length — a string quintet of 40 minutes. This was a most fortuitous beginning. He subsequently discovered several more absolutely marvellous works for string quintet which despite their excellence, are rarely performed, due to their non-standard instrumentation. And the composers are a musicians' dream: Beethoven, Brahms, Dvorak, Mendelssohn, Schubert.

This project – the *Symphonies for Strings* – has the double benefit of significantly enlarging the repertoire of major works for the string orchestra, and bringing to the concert hall great masterpieces which otherwise the audience might never hear.

When he began orchestrating this body of music, he freely passed melodic material back and forth between the two violin sections, rendering them roughly equal in importance in the ensemble. The energy of this transfer is clearly imparted to the audience. Without knowing of this technique, audience members have frequently remarked with great appreciation on the energy of our playing, and on the musical excitement generated by the antiphonal aspect of our performances.

Thus it has come about that we are leaving behind the old style orchestrations which adhere to conceptual limitations no longer valid considering the excellence of modern players. More frequently, as we find appropriate musical material, we are performing the special orchestrations for the Tokyo Sinfonia which take advantage of our players' excellence and the musical concepts which more appropriately feature that excellence.



You will hear all of this in the regular concerts of the Tokyo Sinfonia during this, our third year of challenge and growth as the leading string orchestra of the nation.

### **Oji Hall**

Oji Hall is a premium class concert hall uniquely located in an elegant and prestigious location right in the heart of Tokyo. Its intimate size fits it perfectly for performances by the String Orchestra.

Oji Hall was designed and constructed exclusively for the performance of concerts of classical music by Japan's largest and oldest paper manufacturer. Oji Paper Company dedicated every effort to excellence in the acoustic design and elegance in the interior of its corporate showpiece. Its intimate size makes it ideally suited for the performances of the 19 strings of the Tokyo Sinfonia

### **Sponsor**

During our formative years, we have run the Tokyo Sinfonia on a financial knife edge. Revenues from ticket sales do not cover event expenses for performers' fees and presentation costs.

We are therefore especially grateful to our two principal supporters – the Sendagaya Japanese Institute ([www.jp-sji.org/sji](http://www.jp-sji.org/sji)) which was our very First Supporter, and the Tokyo British Clinic ([www.tokyobritishclinic.com](http://www.tokyobritishclinic.com)) which is the Diamond Sponsor of the Symphonies for Strings series in Oji Hall.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for your kind attention. A copy of this material is available in the Press Kit which you may pick up as you leave.

We are now open to questions from the gentlemen and ladies of the media.