

life & style

Mozart's growing influence on food

Can fruit, vegetables and other foods really benefit from daily doses of classical music?

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SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

Although the claim that listening to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's complicated scores can boost your IQ has been debunked, its effect on bananas has yet to be disputed. So in July, the Hyogo Prefecture-based fruit company Toyoka Chuo Seika shipped out its first batch of "Mozart Bananas" to supermarkets in the area.

Arriving as ordinary unripe bananas from the Philippines, "Mozart Bananas" meet an odd fate. "String Quartet 17" and "Piano Concerto 5 in D major," among other works, play continuously for one week in their ripening chamber, which has speakers installed specifically for this purpose.

Strange as this process may sound, these aren't the first bananas in Japan to take in the strains of the great 18th-century Austrian composer. A fruit wholesaler in Miyazaki Prefecture started doing it three years ago. In fact, over the past few decades, a wide variety of foods and beverages have been exposed to classical vibrations — soy sauce in Kyoto, udon noodles in Tokyo, miso in Yamagata Prefecture, *maitake* mushrooms in Ishikawa Prefecture and "Beethoven Bread" in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, to name a few.

It's enough to make the skeptic wonder: Are such producers really serious about the benefits of classical music?

A representative from the Hyogo fruit company, Isamu Okuda, said that it's no joke, and they believe it makes the bananas sweeter.

"We thought it would be a good investment," Okuda said, "which would set us apart from the pack."

The bananas are sold locally in Toyoka

for ¥300 a bunch, and compared to last year's pre-Mozart record, sales are up. The plan is to branch out to big supermarket chains in the future.

Another company that uses this form of enhancement is the Ohara Shuzo, a sake brewery in Fukushima Prefecture. The senior managing director, Fumiko Ohara, said that they started over 20 years ago when the president, Kosuke Ohara, came across a book about brewing with music. They experimented with jazz, Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven, among others.

"We found Mozart works best for sake," said Ohara, "and that's why we use only his music."

For 24 to 30 days, during the third step of the brewing process, Mozart is played for one hour in the morning and one in the afternoon as the sake ferments in enamel-coated stainless-steel tanks. "Symphony 41" and "Piano Concerto 20" do the trick, she explained, but some of his other pieces can work just as well.

"It makes the sake have a richer fragrance and a milder taste," she said. Bottles range in price from about ¥1,000 to ¥5,000, and since the 1989 debut of the "classic series," they have sold steadily, both locally and through mail order.

Although there is no research data to back up the claim that Mozart's music has any effect on food and beverages, one explanation for its popularity attributes it to theories behind "1/f noise," or "pink noise," which is a high frequency sound said to have relaxing and rejuvenating effects on humans. The music of Mozart happens to be rich in such frequencies — those above 8,000 Hz — which is why sound and music therapy both tend to use it. But can what has not been scientifically proven to enhance human performance be beneficial to food, beverages and plants?



This was partially answered by the amateur botanist, Dorothy Retallack, in her 1973 book, "The Sound of Music and Plants." After playing various kinds of music to plants for three hours daily, she found they "preferred" soothing classical, which made them flourish. Rock and country, on the other hand, had either a debilitating effect or none at all.

A number of food scientists declined to be interviewed for this story because there is not enough research to confidently weigh in on the practice. But that hasn't fazed Hiroko Harada, the manager of Harada Tomato, based in Tokushima Prefecture. Her shiny Mozart-infused tomatoes, called Star Drops, provide all the proof she needs.

Harada first thought of the idea 15 years ago, after she heard about cows whose milk production went up after listening to Mozart. (A farmer in Spain claims his Mozart-listening bovines produce 1 to 6 liters more milk per day than other cows, and a farm in Aichi called Dairy Paradise uses the same method to boost production.)

At the Harada farm, speakers placed throughout the nine greenhouses quietly stream Mozart for about 10 hours a day, from October through May. "The most important thing," said Harada, "is that the music creates a relaxed and comfortable environment for us to work in, and that rubs off on the tomatoes."

She explained that Star Drops are tastier and sweeter, and according to the Tokushima Kogyo Shiken jyo, a public research institute, they have three times more iron and vitamin C than regular tomatoes. Whether this results from the music or skilled organic farming is hard to say, but Harada feels Mozart plays a role. In addition to Star Drops, which cost about ¥750 for a 350 gram bag, the company also launched a salad dressing and a tomato puree, all of which sell well, locally and on the Internet.

While the Japanese public seems to have no problem buying the idea that



Mozart can enhance food and beverages, the related issue of Mozart's impact on humans, known as the "Mozart Effect," has been in the public eye in the West ever since a 1993 study at the University of California, Irvine concluded that Mozart could improve spatial reasoning on the Stanford-Binet IQ test. An avalanche of studies, news reports and products for babies followed, with the discussion always dominated by the IQ question.

According to Don Campbell, the author of numerous books on the subject, including the 1997 "Mozart Effect: Tapping the Power of Music to Heal the Body, Strengthen the Mind, and Unlock the Creative Spirit," this narrow focus misses out on all that Mozart's music has to offer.

"Whether or not Mozart raises IQ is not the right question anymore," Campbell said in a recent telephone interview. "There are better questions to look into that give greater insight into the Mozart Effect. I'm still very pro-Mozart." Until a study investigates Mozart's effect on food and beverages, we'll just have to take it with a grain of Mozart-infused salt.

If you are interested in checking out the Mozart products yourself, visit: Toyoka Chuo Seika at www.toyokaseika.co.jp, Ohara Shuzo at www.oharashuzo.co.jp, Harada Tomato at www4.ocn.ne.jp/~ha-ra-da. (All sites are in Japanese only.)

ON DESIGN

By Jean Snow

Tokyo Design Week roundup

Three weeks ago, Tokyo invited designers from all over the world to show their work at three major design events — Tokyo Designers Week, DesignTide and Design Touch — as well as at a host of other exhibitions scattered across the city. Here are some of our product picks from those shows.

Please note that most of these products were presented as prototypes, with no set manufacturing plans. Our hope is that many of these will see production in 2011.

Whisked away by good design

A lot of the products at Design Week were chosen to show off a new functionality or innovative feature, but Hiroki Takada's Tea Ceremony Chair is all about aesthetics. Featured as part of Tokyo Designers Week's "Professional Exhibition," the bamboo chair takes the form of a traditional Japanese tea-ceremony whisk. Quintessentially Japanese, yet unusual and attractive, it's already found a home in the permanent collection of New York's Museum of Arts and Design (MAD).



www.takadadesign.com

Humidifier with a little bit of bottle



One Tenth Design — named after the idea that reducing our use of energy by a tenth would increase our environmental efficiency rate by ten times — introduced a few prototypes aimed at limiting our excessive use of natural resources. Our pick is Hollow, a humidifier that lets you use an ordinary plastic drink bottle refilled with tap water, which not only gives the product a unique look, but emphasizes its environmental-friendly aspect of being made of just three components.

<http://onetenth1-10.com>

Nosigner and HK pearls stick together

Collaborating with HK, a pearl producer, innovative Japanese designer Nosigner has produced a versatile and magical form — the Gravity Pearl. Gravity Pearl is a cluster of artificial pearls that are magnetically linked to each other to form various shapes. Depending on how you manipulate it, you can wear it as a ring or a bracelet. The pearls are of different sizes and you can link more than one cluster together to form longer chains for a necklace.

<http://nosigner.com> www.pearl.nskizumi.jp

All wrapped up

If there's one trend we noticed at the various design events this year it was a number of products taking inspiration from origami. One of our favorite examples was Naoki Kawamoto's Orishiki lineup. The word itself is a mashup created by Kawamoto — "ori" from origami, and "shiki" from *furushiki*, the large cloths often used in Japan to wrap items. Kawamoto's boxlike constructions — a glasses case, a handbag and a suitcase — start off completely flat and have magnetic segments that allow them to be folded into the 3-D objects in question. Visit Kawamoto's website to see a video of his Orishiki concept in action, and you'll likely be wowed, just as we were.

www.naokikawamoto.com

Sofa storage

How many times have you lost loose change or keys in the folds of a chair or sofa? Inspired by such little mishaps, architect Daisuke Motogi has turned the culprits, those sofa folds, into the main feature of his new chair design, aptly named Lost in Sofa. His chair has as many folds as possible in which sitters are encouraged to tuck in whatever they may have handy — TV remotes, magazines, books, decorations — it'll even hold a cup of coffee.

www.dskmtg.com

A leaf of imagination

The Leaf Letter collection is a series of aerogramlike letter papers printed and shaped like leaves. A collaboration between EDING:POST (designer Tomohiro Kato) and botanical shop NEO GREEN, they are beautifully simple. Write your message on the blank side, then fold it into an envelope.

www.neogreen.co.jp
<http://ed-ing-post.com>



Symphonic products: A bunch of Toyoka Chuo Seika's Mozart bananas and the Ohara Brewery's Jyunmai Daiginjo, from the classic series of Mozart sake.

AIMI NAKANAKO, COURTESY OF OHARA SHUZO



WORDS to LIVE by

As told to JUDIT KAWAGUCHI

Mariko Bando, 64, is the president of Showa Women's University in Tokyo. She is also a best-selling author with more than 30 books under her belt, including "The Dignity of a Woman," which has sold over 3 million copies. An advocate of women's rights, Bando is director of the Japan National Committee of UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women). Her distinguished career has had many highlights. She was the first woman to join the prime minister's office as a career bureaucrat in 1969, where she served the government for 34 years. In 1995, she became vice governor of Saitama Prefecture and in 1998, she was appointed consul general of Japan in Brisbane, Australia, the only woman ever to hold such a post. From 2001 until 2003, she was director general of the Bureau for Gender Equality in then-prime minister Junichiro Koizumi's cabinet. Bando is equally successful in her private life: She's happily married with two children, and is well-known for her mentoring skills, which have earned her the respect and love of people young and old.

Dignity means that when you're breaking the glass ceiling, you do it very carefully to make sure that the shards don't hurt anyone. And afterward, of course, you pick up the pieces. In Japan, we have "bamboo" barriers that keep women out of the circle of power. Luckily, bamboo is flexible: So, as long as you are, too, you can squeeze your way into the center, just like a little snake or lizard.

I never felt inferior to men. At school I knew the answers as well as any boy, so I grew up thinking that women and men had the same potential. The challenge is to know oneself. I quickly realized that I'd do better at work than in the kitchen.

Subordinates, especially women, must educate their bosses. The reality is that company rules and modes of behavior were set by men for men. Even today, few bosses know how to handle women workers. Men have their own unspoken understanding of the way a company system operates, but women usually need more verbal communication. The trouble is, most supervisors are men, and they are worried about giving feedback to women. They are scared of being labeled "too tough" or even of being accused of sexual harassment. Yet if a woman wants to grow, she must teach her bosses how to talk to her in a way that she understands.

One should never assume that others know what one means.

Adults get jobs but it's the work that matures the person. I grew up thanks to my job and my colleagues.

Nobody remembers your failures as well as you do. I couldn't forgive myself when I didn't do a job well. I was a very good student, so I assumed that I'd do well at work. But for the first decade of working, I made a lot of

mistakes. Now I know that I was too tough on myself. You don't have to be!

No matter what happens or how nice your husband may be, keep your job! In the 20th century, most Japanese women, unfortunately, quit their jobs after they got married or had children. So much talent and possibility was lost. I hope that the 21st-century lifestyle is about women being able to have a family while continuing to work. It can be done and it's worth it!

Don't make excuses for yourself. Most people shift the blame when things don't go well for them. Don't be such a person. Look at yourself from a distance so you can see your situation for the way it is, and improve it. Work on yourself before you ask others to do overtime.

When you meet a woman with Queen Bee Syndrome, you must take the stings with smiles and bring her more nectar than any worker bee, ever. Sadly, women in senior positions often look at younger women as competition and instead of supporting them, they make their lives even tougher. "I suffered a lot to get here, so you should, too!" is their attitude. These queen bees, ironically, often assume that a man can do a better job than a woman, so they promote men over women. It's a very sad predicament for everyone, and it shows that these queens don't have enough confidence in themselves. They take pleasure in refusing to help or even sabotaging other women. Only consistent good job performance can convince such bees of your worth; and if not, don't worry as their reigns always come to a bitter end. I'm not suggesting there'll be sweet revenge — just telling you to let nature take its course.

The biggest mistake women make is to quit their jobs when things get tough. This way they never taste the happiness of success and a job well done, which they surely would do a few years down the line. I never thought about quitting a job, and somehow the struggling turned into rewarding challenges that I could never have dreamed about. Hang in there for dear life and it will be worthwhile!

Small, boring, seemingly unimportant details create a big beautiful picture. It's not a once-in-a-while brilliant work performance that matters the most, it's your everyday behavior that makes people want to work with you. If you're always on time; if you're polite, helpful, reliable and keep improving — your colleagues will want you on their team and you will be given more and more responsibility.

Don't be afraid of getting older! Many people, especially women, worry about aging. But if I had a chance to be younger again, I'd say, "No, thank you!" My 20s were exciting but they were all about hard work and mistakes. The 30s were much better, as I understood my job and how to be a better mother and wife. My 40s were fantastic as I had responsibilities as a team leader — and since then, I feel that with every year I contribute more. That's happiness.

Judit Kawaguchi loves to listen. She is a volunteer counselor and a TV reporter on NHK's "Journeys in Japan." Learn more at: <http://juditfan.blog58.fc2.com>
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