

Challenged to a musical for someone over 70 years old



A musical “Anne of Green Gables” was performed on November 2 and 3 at the theater of the Tokyo International Forum. The performance was released four times in total: a matinee and an evening show on each day. I was one of the performers on stage. The musical was hosted by The Classic Live for the United Nations (CLUN), a nonprofit organization approved by the Cabinet Office of Japan. CLUN supports the UNITED NATIONS by promoting international exchange and cultivating human resources of the performing arts.

Program Messages from the minister of foreign affairs in Japan and from the director of public relations of the Embassy of Canada in Tokyo were on the program. Dignitaries from ministries of foreign affairs and of the environment and from more than ten embassies in Tokyo were in attendance to appreciate the musical. The show was played by more than 100 performers. The musical was a very dynamic and moving one.

I felt that both my body and mind were rejuvenated just from the impetus of the musical. Let me report how I became involved with the production.

This past August, one of my friends, the president of the Senior Club (A group of seniors above 60 with a total membership of more than 300) recommended me to participate in the musical which had an article in a newspaper announcing for auditions. Initially, I wasn't interested, thinking my age of 72 was too old for any parts. But in appreciation for the community's recommendation, I entered.

To my great surprise, they accepted me to be part of the cast. I thought it was partly because of my visit to Prince Edward Island in Canada five years ago, during the year of the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the first edition of the novel, “Anne of Green Gables” written by L.M. Montgomery.

Our practice with other participants began from mid August at the Olympic Center in Shinjuku, Tokyo. We rehearsed daily from 6 pm to 10 pm. At the beginning, I was also challenged to be one of the dancers. The dance number marked the start of the musical and brought down curtain with it. About 50 young men and ladies were involved.

The dances were very vigorous and considerably difficult for someone old like me. My legs didn't function as I had expected and I committed errors. Meanwhile, I caught a cold, (probably from exhaustion) and I was absent from the practices for more than two weeks.

When I returned to the practice, the female director told me that I would instead participate only in the chorus, combined with a more gentle dance routine. In addition, however, knowing my background, she assigned me the following three tasks,

1. Give a short lecture to the participants about the background and the history of the novel “Anne of Green Gables” during break time.
2. Write an essay about the novel and the musical in the program that would be distributed to spectators.

3. Transmit in Spanish the core message of Anne to spectators at the finale.

On the one hand, I appeared in less of the scenes but at the same time, I had more important roles in the musical. At the first performance of the show, I was a little bit nervous because the spotlight was too bright and I was unable to see the audience in the front row. From the second show on, however, I believe I carried out the mission well.



Greeting in Spanish (center)

Among the participants of the musical, there were noted actors and actresses in Japan. Most of the young people who auditioned for the musical were very talented and would become, I thought, capable actors and actresses in the future. I felt very fortunate to have joined them at the prestigious theater in Tokyo. Certainly, for me, it was a very significant experience. I was the oldest of all the participants.

It is inevitable that our bodies become senescent with age, but we would like to at least maintain the youthfulness of mind. The way of thinking and living of Anne, the protagonist of the story, were very positive and she maintained her dreams until she realized them. We have much to learn from Anne.

Dr. Shegeaki Hinohara, a very noted doctor and director of a big hospital in Japan is currently 102 years old. When he was 100 years old, he conducted a musical and he played in it at the theater in New York. This gives us courage to challenge our lives!?

“Tomorrow is the new start of everything” are the words Anne said many times in the drama and she challenged to pave her way, facing many hardships and sorrows. How I wish we would like to apply her young flexible spirit in our daily lives. Even though the body becomes senescent, we should never permit our mind to become senescent. That is the core message of this musical, I believe. Playing with so many young stars was also an exciting experience for me. I am thankful to everyone who has supported me in pursuing my dream.



The finale. (Only the left side of the picture appears in this page. I am at the corner of the back line).