

JR East Philharmonic

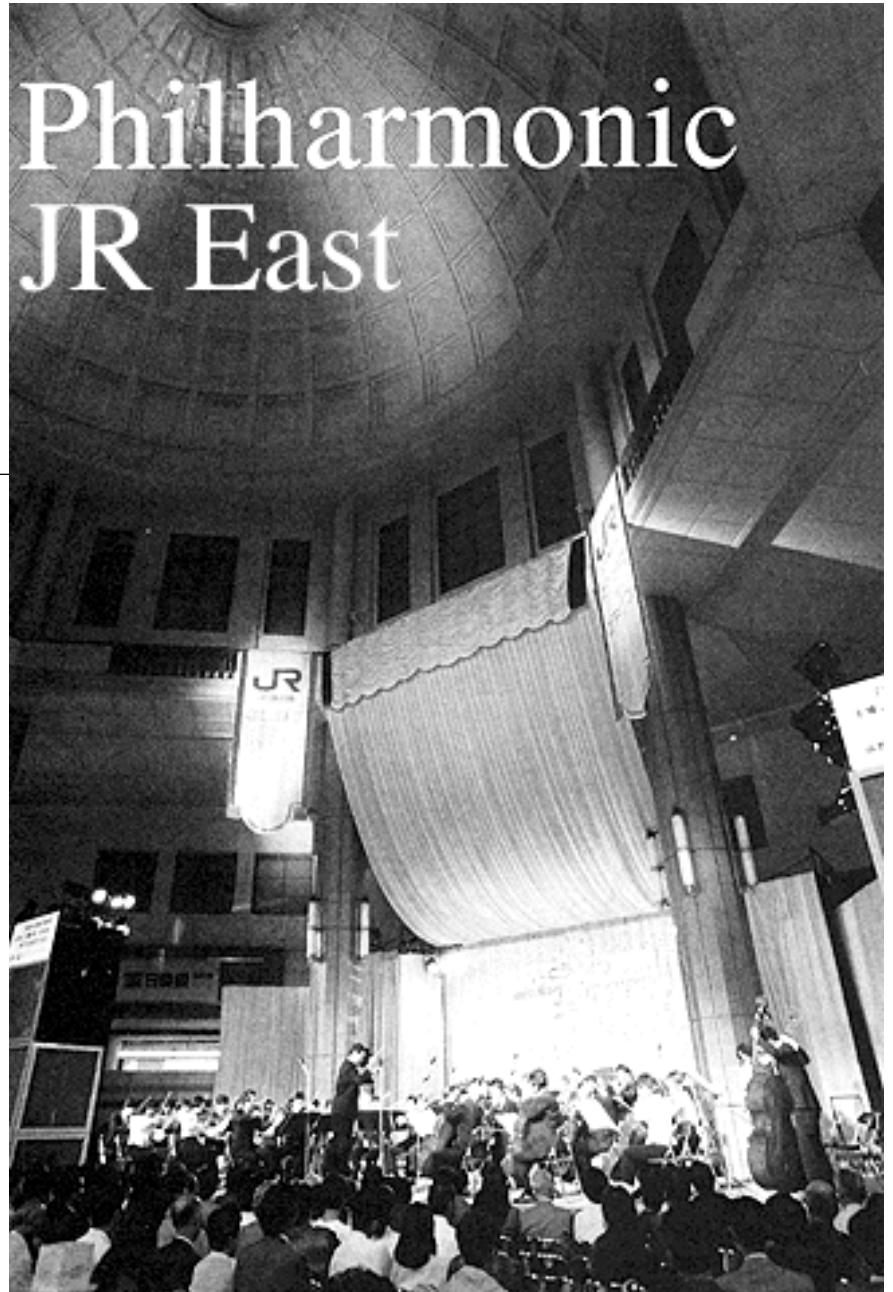
JR East

An orchestra formed by 34 multi-talented railway employees

Dusk is falling and the Ohi Factory is completely enveloped in darkness. It is a JR East factory—its forerunner was the Shimbashi Factory, Japan's first railway factory built in 1871. At present, the Ohi Factory is engaged in the inspection, repair, remodeling, etc., of about 5000 electric cars serving the Metropolitan Tokyo area. The employees have gone home, but a corner of the factory hall is lit. Going closer and opening a door, you hear music - Mozart's Symphony No. 40.

The JR East Philharmonic Orchestra practises about twice a month in the hall. The orchestra was started in January 1991 by JR East music lovers. It has 34 members with an average age of about 37. They are from diverse workplaces, ticket inspectors, construction workers, thermal power plant employees, public information workers, travel agents, accounting clerks, etc. The orchestra is actively developing by playing music at ceremonies and events at the request of JR East, and by giving a musical performance each year.

The orchestra leader is Mr Toru Yoshikawa. Born in Hyogo Prefecture in 1947, he is 47 years old. As manager of the rolling stock division in the Transport and Rolling Stock Department of JR East, he is concerned with all matters related to rolling stock, developing car design and improvement concepts, rolling stock deployment plans, and property management concerning rolling stock. Mr Yoshikawa began working for JNR in 1974 after receiving his masters from the Machinery Department, Engi-



■ Performing at the Tokyo Station Concert, a free classical, under the brick dome.

neering Faculty of the Tokyo Institute of Technology. Later, he worked at factories and rolling stock design offices as a rolling stock expert.

His interest in music began at the age of eight. His parents who loved music, made him take violin lessons. In his middle and high schools, he was a member of chamber orchestra clubs, and as a university student, he belonged to his university orchestra and improved his skill in playing the violin. After starting work for JNR, he

still enjoyed music, but it was after he joined the JR East Philharmonic Orchestra that he began to play the violin more seriously. "When I entered JNR, I never dreamed that I would play music in the company. I was surprised and at the same time greatly heartened to discover so many music lovers in JR East." said Yoshikawa with deep emotion. At home, he is the father of two sons and a daughter. His family are all music lovers, and his children are taking violin and piano



■ Mr Yoshikawa (*Brahms fan*)

lessons. Next, Yoshikawa wants to challenge violin making. A friend who belonged to the same university orchestra now makes violins as his occupation, so Yoshikawa wants to visit his workshop and learn to make violins with his own hands. Asked about the problems he has to solve as conductor, he says, "We are all company employees, so we do not have enough free time to meet and practise. It is very hard for us to unify our thoughts on music and create music of our own." He continued proudly, "However, what is good about our orchestra is that it displays its real power more in formal performance than when we are practising. We are strong at the last moment, and this is a point we would like to make to others."

Ms Rie Otani plays second violin. Born in Saitama Prefecture in 1966, she is 28 years old. Her mother plays the violin, piano and Japanese harp, and her younger sister plays the piano and Japanese harp, too. It seems all her family are music lovers. Ms Otani took piano lessons from 3 to 18 years of age. She was interested in the violin, and began learning it about 4 years ago, just when the orchestra was formed, so she was invited to join. She worked as an English typist with a Japanese enterprise from 1987, but has been working as a receptionist since 1990 at the Tokyo Station Gallery, the fine arts gallery at Tokyo Central Station. She is always thinking about how she can best serve visitors to the gallery. Ms Otani is deeply interested not only in music but also in painting. She writes poems as a pastime. "I think we can express our

experiences directly in poems. When I am inspired by music or paintings, I write down my inspirations on paper. To me, my poems are proof of my life." she said. A woman of delicate sensitivity, she is also active, enjoying horse riding. She says she is attracted by the beauty of horses. She is a member of the JR East Riding Club. Asked about her future, she says, "In the future, I would like to work in the areas of culture and fine arts. I would like to deepen my present activities. I wish I could some day become a supporter of cultural activities, assisting young talented artists, apart from playing music myself. This is my dream." Slender though she is, she is a woman filled with great enthusiasm.



■ Ms Otani (*Mendelssohn fan*)

Mr Makoto Shimamura, who plays the viola, was born in Osaka Prefecture in 1954. He is 40 years old, and is a chief researcher with the Safety Research Laboratory of JR East. With risk assessment of railway systems as his study theme, he is researching present and desirable future levels of safety in railway systems. He played the euphonium in his middle school brass band. And in his high school and university days, he played the recorder in an ensemble consisting both of students and ordinary people. After graduating in forestry from the University of Tokyo, he joined JNR, and played the viola in the Toranomon Philharmonic Orchestra of amateur musicians. He contributed to starting the JR East Philharmonic Orchestra, and now plays the viola in it. With experience in playing three different musical instruments, Mr Shimamura says he loves the viola most. "You can-

not play the viola solo, but its attractiveness is fully demonstrated when it is played with a violin or a cello. I rather like working alone, but in playing the viola, I find great joy in playing in concert with others." he says. When he was a boy, he did not get good marks in music, he continued, and added, "After I played with others in musical performances, I understood the combinations of melodies, or in other words, what sounds are made by which musical instruments." At home, he is the father of three children who take piano lessons. He keeps a tortoise as a pet, and says that he likes watching reptiles. He travels overseas frequently, and when he visits Thailand, he often has a snake wound around his body to enjoy the cool feel of it. Mr. Shimamura plans to learn Chinese and Korean, saying that because he is Asian, these are the languages he wants to master first.

The JR East Philharmonic Orchestra, which has a history of just 4 years, will surely grow through the efforts of music-loving railway people like these. ■



■ Mr Shimamura

(*Max Bruch & Max Reger fan*)