

IINUMA, DEMSTER, HARMONIA TRIUMPH AT TULLY

BY RICHARD MALONE AND PATRICIA STEVENS

At the 25th anniversary of the Harmonia Opera, dedicated to Japanese opera, the American premiere of "Kurofune" (Black Ships) by the outstanding composer Kosaku Yamada was presented to a full Alice Tully concert hall last Monday evening.

The Lincoln Center concert hall was crowded with dignitaries and celebrities flown in from Japan to celebrate the handiwork of producer Madame Emiko Iinuma. Present were Japan's Ambassador, Motoatsu Sakurai; Chairman of the Congress of Racial Equality, Mr. Roy Innis; one of the great sopranos of opera Lucine Amara—just to name a few! A long list of sponsors made the evening possible, among which were the Japan Opera Foundation, Mitsubishi, Canon, Bank of West, Continental Airlines, Toyota, Sony and many more. Families and friends were shouting and applauding adding to the success of the evening.

With an artistic staff of over 60 people, Emiko Iinuma, artistic and stage director, stepped on stage elegantly dressed with smiling and vibrant eyes and became master of ceremonies, gracing us with her superb speaking voice. One knew instantly that she was a singer, actress and teacher with years of experience and good fortune. A woman who brings such music, friendship and love from one great nation to another great nation deserves the Nobel Prize. She is an outstanding lady of our time.

Her partner, dynamic maestro James Demster, conducted the superb blending of sounds of the 35-piece Harmonia Orchestra with clarity and precision. A resonating Shakuhachi (a Japanese bamboo flute) played by Master Seldin wafted through the hall supported by Kabuki percussions ably handled by the veteran professional Howard Hirsch. Demster displayed confidence in his

expression of what the composer Yamada intended. He grasped the feeling of the work, gave it to the ensemble that in turn gave it back to all of us. Together the Harmonia Orchestra and singers, dancers, chorus, NY men's choir, six children and a varied cast of singing artists made making new music look not difficult. Tenor Harry Nishitani, 70 years young, played no fewer than six different roles, a real character actor and a person to emulate.

Selina Miyazaki leads the cast with a pleasing, well-focused timbre; Wayne Hobbs sang with charm and tenderness, a delightful couple. Young, handsome Toshinobu Kayama, baritone, with great stage presence performed the role of the Samurai who plots the assassination of the American hero, regrets and recants and then sacrifices himself for the emperor. The composer Yamada's very singable melodies were well performed by Miwa Kawaguchi, Yasuko Tsuboi, James Johnson, Edward Albert and James Woodlee with strength and conviction. It was most impressive not only to see those who had come in from Japan to New York, but also to see our local artists singing the memorized Japanese poetry, all for this one

performance. What a release of passion, time, energy and funds. Yamada has put into his score harmonically beautiful themes with many motifs that provoke the imagination while never overshadowing the singing voices. A very flexible composer, his music allowed the stage director to use a free hand to blend the Japanese texts with kneeling and tea drinking, sword carrying and Sake parties. Machi Geisha dancers Mieko Takahashi and Hiromi Kubo were an additional visual joy. The story is an account of the 1856 arrival of black sail ("Kurofune") American ships arriving in Japan set into Japanese verse amenable to music by librettist Percy Nowell. Thank goodness an English translation by tenor Harry Nishitani was made available to us. There were many exciting, colorful costumes with lovely fans by classy choreographer and designer Helen Moss.

Emiko Iinuma is a singing musician, a real artist/producer with concern for her audience. She runs

the Harmonia Opera Training School at 2109 Broadway, NY—a lady you must meet. The ticket prices were affordable. Many friends and future business acquaintances were on hand. Wallace Wong was present also. He is carrying on the traditions of his sister Asian talent scout and world performer Jadin Wong of Wong Management. HAKUSHYU NOAME!

(Please send reactions to Richard Malone & Patricia Stevens at ciosinc@yahoo.com).



Ms. Emiko Iinuma