

Letter From NEW YORKERS

Meet Meg Okura
by Justin Tedaldi

"I create music that is true to myself," says Tokyo native Meg Okura. This Juilliard-educated, Grammy-nominated jazz violinist, who has performed with luminaries like David Bowie, Diana Krall and Herbie Hancock, continues to expand her definition of self through "chamber jazz" that spans the history and traditions of celebrated American, Asian and European sounds.



Released this month is "NPO Trio Live at the Stone," recorded during a residency at the titular East Village venue with husband Sam Newsome on saxophone and Jean-Michel Pilc on piano, creating a new sound that hints of familiar melodies, including well-known Yiddish songs and even excerpts of John Coltrane.

Okura explains that she has always felt emotionally connected to Yiddish tunes, whose melodies and chords can be considered both sad and happy at the same time. "Sadness is absolutely necessary for me to experience true happiness in the future. And every time I hear Jewish songs, it reminds me of my childhood," she says.

"Not only am I a Jew, but I have also studied German and Hebrew, so I always felt connected to the Yiddish melodies--minor melodies with major chords. I always cry every time I play 'Oyfn Pripetchnik.' May 13th welcomes "IMA IMA," her newest studio album that includes unique instrumentation including *shinobue* (Japanese flute) and more than a half dozen special guests from the jazz world performing with Okura's Pan Asian Chamber Jazz Ensemble. A reflection on the Hebrew word for "mother" (Okura gave birth to her daughter Naomi seven years ago) with the songs first taking root during her pregnancy, the album's Mother's Day release marks the next chapter in the life of this gifted and eclectic musician. For more info, visit www.megokura.com.

(Justin Tedaldi has written about Japanese arts and entertainment since 2005. For more of his stories, visit <http://jetaany.org/magazine/>.)

THE JAPAN VOICE

COOL JAPAN from New Yorkers' Viewpoints

"Typewriter Letters Have a Similar Warmth to Handwriting" says Paul Schweitzer, the second generation of his family business in Manhattan for 86 years

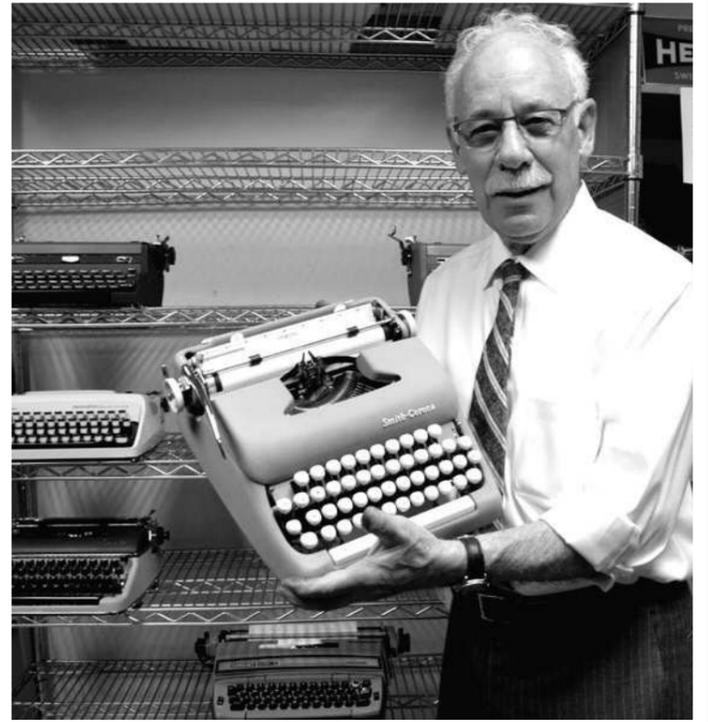
Until about 40 years ago, it was mainly typewriters being used in offices throughout Europe and the Americas. Nearly every person had a typewriter, or had access to one. Currently, there are no American typewriter manufacturers, and in Manhattan, there is only one typewriter repair shop. That shop is the Gramercy Typewriter Company, established in 1932 and located on the 4th floor of a building on 5th Avenue between 22nd and 23rd Street. Taking over the shop from his father in 1959, Paul Schweitzer (79) is the second generation of his family to run the repair shop, and has been devoted to repairing typewriters for 59 years.

"Long ago, if you opened a telephone book, there were about six pages of repair shop listings. When you hit the keys of a typewriter, you think about the person you are sending a letter to, right?"

You can feel a warmth that resembles something that is handwritten, and as a result, it makes the recipient happy."

During the Christmas season, he sells around 100 secondhand typewriters a month, and says that it's specifically the younger generation, who do not know about typewriters, who are seeking them out. Besides selling secondhand machines and replacing typewriter ribbons, people from near and far visit or mail in typewriter repair requests daily. There are constantly about forty machines in line to be fixed, as can be seen by the retro portable typewriters lined up in a row inside the shop. Among New Yorkers, there is a quiet boom for these writing instruments, as they are becoming a trendy must-have item and a profound hobby for some.

(Article and Photo by Ryoichi Miura /Translated by Sara Welch)



Paul Schweitzer (79) holds a 60s Smith-Corona Typewriter

Koto and Shamisen Concert Marks 25th Year of Masayo Ishigure's Career in the U.S.

Koto and shamisen player Masayo Ishigure's 25-year career in the United States was celebrated at a concert at the Sheen Center of the Loreto Theater in Manhattan. Ishigure began playing the koto at the age of five, and the *jiuta* shamisen seven years later. After receiving a degree in Japanese traditional music from Takasaki Junior Arts College, Ishigure was trained by Tadao and Kazue Sawai, and began to teach the koto at Wesleyan University.

After starting with a standard piece "The Sea in Spring," Ishigure played "West of Somewhere," composed by shakuhachi player John Kaizan Neptune, and her own piece "Bamboo Magic," in



ensemble with the shakuhachi, classic guitar, percussion and bass. "West of Somewhere" was a multicultural piece, including an Indian melody. "Bamboo Magic" contained ad libs of the koto

and shamisen, a rarity in Japan's traditional music, and the instruments were played in gracious harmony with twelve-bar blues.

Dancer Miki Orihara performed to

"To the Sea" and "Zelkova," composed by Hideaki Kurihara. After an entertaining talk by John Kaizan Neptune, the concert climaxed with an ensemble with thirteen kotos and a shakuhachi.

Ishigure then spoke to the audience, expressing gratitude to her supporters.

The Japan News
by The Yomiuri Shinbun
https://www.yomiuri-info.jp/daily_yomiuri/nys/

She held back tears as she mentioned how her mentors had told her 25 years ago that she would never regret learning the koto because it would someday become a globally known instrument. (Article and Photo by Mayumi Nashida/Translated by Kenji Nakano)

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Comfort Women Issue: Fake News and the Facts

Many people in the world believe comfort women as the following:

"During WW2, atrocious Japanese military personnel abducted hundreds of thousands of girls, and forced them into sexual servitude. They were called comfort women. Most of them were tortured, killed and died. It was an act of sexual human trafficking and a war crime committed by the Japanese military."

What makes people believe this? One of the reasons is media coverage.

The word "comfort women" is not a common word in English. So everytime the word "comfort women" appears in a news article, it is always followed by an explanation. Let's see how newspapers and news agencies explained the word "comfort women" in articles published this year:

• *The Washington Post* (January 31)

"Historians say as many as 200,000 women in occupied countries were coerced by the Japanese Imperial Army to work as sex slaves, euphemistically known as "comfort women."

• *The Wall Street Journal* (January 9)

"[Comfort women were] women forced into sexual service for Japanese soldiers."

• *The New York Times* (January 12)

"[Comfort women were] women forced into sexual slavery for the Japanese military during World War II."

• *Reuters* (January 8)

"Comfort women", a euphemism for girls and women forced to work in Japan's wartime brothels... as many as 200,000 Korean women were forced to work in the brothels."

• *Deutsche Welle*, Germany (January 12)

"[Comfort women were] women who were forced to work in frontline brothels for the Japanese military from the start of the occupation of the Korean Peninsula in 1910 until the end of the war in 1945."

• *The Straits Times*, Singapore (January 12)

"Between 80,000 and 200,000 women, mostly from the Korean Peninsula but also from China, Taiwan and South-east Asia, had been recruited to provide sex to the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II."

• *Asahi Shimbun*, English version (January 9)

"...the former comfort women, who were forced to provide sex to Japanese soldiers before and during World War II. Many of them came from the Korean Peninsula."

• *The Japan Times* (January 10)

"[Comfort women were] women forced to work in Japanese wartime military brothels"

Which article do you think is correct?

The answer is none. For the correct definition of "comfort women", please read the excerpt from "What were the comfort women?" by Ph.D. Koichi

Mera in chapter 2 of the January 27th edition.

The problem is that all the reporters and journalists copy and paste the definition of "comfort women" from past articles, without doing their own research.

Some reporters are Japanese. They must be able to read Japanese materials, but never seem to research on their own, or may intentionally write Japan as the villain.

What are common in the articles above are the words "enforcement", "sex slaves" and "Japanese atrocities against women." Because all media writes based on these images, the fabricated narrative of "comfort women" penetrates and disseminates more and more.

This situation is caused because, for many years, the Japanese government did not refute the fabrications with the facts, but instead made political compromises and apologized with ambiguous expressions. The Japanese government is changing now, but it is still not enough. We must send more information overseas.

We should not just complain about this situation, but do something positive as a civil group. So, we have published the pocket booklet entitled "What is 'Comfort Women'? BASIC FACTS." We have made both English and Japanese versions.

People usually do not care about the comfort women issue, especially those who are not Japanese.

What is
"Comfort Women"?

BASIC FACTS



Japanese Women for Justice and Peace

They do not read thick, profound books either. So, we made this booklet very easy to read for beginners who are new to the comfort women issue and would like to learn about it. The content is a simple Q&A style with lots of figures and photos. It is postcard size, and is 32-pages in full color. If you would like a copy, please visit our "Nadeshiko Action" website for more details.

We really hope that you will read and use this booklet, and also hope that many people will understand the comfort women issue, instead of being misled by fake news.

(Yumiko Yamamoto is the president of the grass roots civil group "Nadeshiko Action", also known as "Japanese Women for Justice and Peace".)

NADESIKO ACTION

Japanese Women for Justice and Peace

<http://nadesiko-action.org>