

Creating the Moment

Ken Hsieh

Words: Saya Burke-Gaffney Photo: E. Miyoshi

The sensation and atmosphere of a live performance is something you cannot experience without actually being there. That sensation and atmosphere always changes even if the songs and musicians are the same. A conductor is someone who leads the musicians in live performances and at the same time reaches out to the audience to bring them the excitement of music. Ken Hsieh is a conductor who is gaining prominence with his remarkable talent. Born in Edmonton, Alberta, Ken is currently conducting all over the world, and is one of the most prospected young conductors.

As a young boy, Ken participated in various extra curricular activities. On the one hand he was a member of a soccer team, on the other, a member of Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra. As a university student, he entered a pre-law program first but then reaffirmed his interest and passion for music and decided to pursue his career as a musician, studying piano and percussion. However, a life-changing event happened when Ken was turning 20. Accidentally, he smashed his fingers while playing handball and became unable to play the piano anymore. While he was struggling with his future, he saw a fascinating gentleman conducting a famous orchestra on

television. He was amazed and moved by his performance. Later, he found out that the gentleman was a famous Japanese conductor, Seiji Ozawa, and was actually from the same school as the former music director of Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Kazuyoshi Akiyama, who had conducted Vancouver Youth Symphony Orchestra when Ken was a member. These two conductors inspired Ken and he started to be more and more attracted to the world of conducting.

In the same year, Ken went to Japan to visit a friend he had met at a music festival. His friend learned that Ken was interested in becoming a conductor, and tried to get in touch with a former professor/conductor, Morihiro Okabe. After trying to convince him to meet Ken, Professor Okabe finally agreed to see him for just 15 minutes, which turned into 3 hours of Professor Okabe trying to convince Ken to move to Japan to study conducting. Although Ken still had one more year at the university in Canada, he decided to follow Professor Okabe's advice and went to study conducting at the Toho Gakuen School of Music in Japan. After over a year of strenuous training under Professor Okabe, Ken started to win attention from other conductors, including Kazuyoshi Akiyama. At the age of



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22, he performed for the first time as an assistant conductor at the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo.

When Ken finished his 2nd year, he moved to Vienna, Austria to deepen his study of music.

After a short while, he returned to Vancouver for Christmas break, where he heard about an opening for an assistant conductor position with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. Although there were a number of talented older conductors



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with much more experience, Ken applied for an audition and was chosen. After deep deliberation, he decided to take the job, and he became the youngest assistant conductor ever in that orchestra at the age of 23.

In 2003, he founded the Vancouver Metropolitan Orchestra in order to provide opportunities for talented young musicians, and the orchestra celebrated its 10th anniversary this year. They will be holding a concert on May 24th with a special guest, Yu Kosuge, one of the top pianists in Japan. Information is available on the website (www.vmocanada.com).

"You can say I became a conductor by a fluke," Ken says

with a smile. He would have taken a completely different path, if he hadn't injured his hand, hadn't seen Seiji Ozawa perform on television, or if he hadn't gone to Japan to see his friend. Life is made up of a series of unexpected happenings. He says that is why you should cherish every encounter and every event in your life as it might help you in some way in the future.

All the past experience and encounters in Ken's life have helped him become a great conductor. His maturing skills ensure that he will be providing more and more people with the dazzling sensation and atmosphere of live performances, and letting them enjoy and live in the moment.

