

**The 14th Fukuoka Asian Culture Prizes 2003
PUBLIC FORUM**

**Asian Pop Seminar – An Evening with Dick Lee
“A Musical Journey in Search of My Asian Identity”**

Dick LEE

Date: 18:00 – 20:00 Saturday, September 20, 2003

Place: IMS Hall (Tenjin, Chuo-ku, Fukuoka City)

Program:

Outline of the Forum and Introduction of Laureate
Professor Fujii Tomoaki (Chubu Institute for Advanced Studies)

Performance

Mr. Dick Lee (Arts and Culture Prize Laureate)

Charity Auction

Last Song

Mr. Dick Lee

Moderator: Mr. James Tengan



I

Outline of Forum and Introduction of the Laureate



FUJII TOMOAKI: Allow me to speak first about the background as to why Mr. Dick Lee has been nominated for, and awarded with the Arts and Culture Prize for the Fukuoka Asian Culture Prizes 2003.

Sports are not the only event that the Olympics are all about!

While the Olympic games have surely become the world's most celebrated sporting event, it has also made a great contribution in the field of cultural promotion. As some of you may recall, the opening ceremony for the Sydney Olympics in 2000 was highlighted by the music of the Aboriginal people, the indigenous inhabitants of Australia.

As President of the Asia Pacific Society for Ethnomusicology, I participated in numerous discussions over this opening ceremony prior to the Sydney Olympics. In the end, we came to the conclusion that the unique cultural traits particular to the region should be presented in the opening ceremony and thus, the aboriginal music was chosen to represent Australia. This particular choice in music reflected our message that the ethnic minorities and indigenous inhabitants who have been somewhat neglected from time to time should be more valued and appreciated along with their unique culture.

International Art Conference

The International Art Conference was held consecutively in Paris in 1999 and in Sao Paulo in 2000. The focus of attention at the conferences was drawn to issues surrounding regional arts and culture peculiar to one particular nation, ethnic group, or a particular regional society, which has been faced with phenomenal globalization. Various new styles of music were brought up in the conference, which included Sunda Pop, a style of music sung in the local language of the Sunda region of Indonesia, Pop Morlam, a mixture of pop and the traditional art performance of Morlam which is popular in Thailand and Laos, and Aboriginal Pop, a blend of the aforementioned Aboriginal music and pop. These styles of music provided some good examples of the culture that is deeply rooted in the respective regions, yet is becoming increasingly acknowledged by the rest of the world. Thus, one of the major trends seen in the arts and culture of the 21st century was confirmed in the conference.

“Proclamation of Masterpieces” by UNESCO*

In May 2001, UNESCO created an international distinction entitled “Proclamation of Masterpieces” and the Nogaku Theatre was officially proclaimed as a masterpiece from Japan. The second Proclamation of Masterpieces is scheduled to be made official later this year. The world is now faced with rapid globalization and modernization. In response to such profound changes, this initiative will reflect the existing trends to protect the diverse cultural assets that have been nurtured in respective regions, and that are also commonly appreciated in other parts of the world. Asian Pop has been gaining attention in this regard. Pop as a form of culture represents not only music but also movies and arts. There has been

* The official name is “Proclamation on Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity,” adopted by UNESCO in 1998. From Japan, the Nogaku Theatre was added to the list in the 1st proclamation in May 2001, and the Ningyo Johruri Bunraku Puppet Theatre in the 2nd proclamation in November 2003.

increased global recognition of Asian Pop, which is spreading widely and exerting a great influence over many people.

The background for awarding Mr. Dick Lee, the Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize Laureate

As enlightened audience may have already known, that is exactly what Mr. Lee's work has encapsulated. Mr. Lee released "The Mad Chinaman" in Tokyo in 1990, an album that garnered him high acclaim. His work is deeply rooted in Asia, yet it is presented in a very sophisticated style with a rock music beat. His music is also familiar to us all. In this sense, Mr. Lee is definitely a prominent artist and pioneer in the genre of Asian Pop.

Mr. Lee grew up in Singapore, a country where various cultures coexist. When Mr. Lee went to live and study in England, he said that he felt at ease, as if England had been his home. Yet, he also admits that the experience made him realize the Asian blood that was within him. Through such experiences, Mr. Lee has come to create music that emphasizes and encompasses various cultures of Asia. For example, Mr. Lee intentionally uses a great deal of 'Singlish' in his music, which is a variety of English spoken in Singapore. By doing so, his message has been successfully delivered that language, the most common tool in our everyday life, should be acknowledged and valued. Mr. Lee has created a wide variety of music. However different forms his music may take, Mr. Lee never fails to search for his identity as an Asian in his work. He has created his own style within one genre of music, pop music, and presents it in an easily comprehensible manner, yet with extreme sophistication and profoundness. Paying keen attention to the unique culture of each region, in Asia in particular, Mr. Lee successfully expresses his views with a rock beat, the common language of the world. In the arena of music production, Mr. Lee has played a vital role in highlighting Asia and introducing it to the rest of the world. For these marvelous achievements, Mr. Lee is truly worthy as a laureate for the Arts and Culture Prize of the Fukuoka Asian Culture Prizes.

"Rice"-- The newly released album of Mr. Dick Lee

The title of Mr. Lee's new album is 'Rice,' and this title also deliberately contains his assertion. Indeed, rice is consumed and appreciated by all Asians. This album is definitely dedicated to the Asians who live on rice, a common staple food in Asia.

I should stop talking and let Mr. Lee himself present his music to you. Ladies and gentlemen, please enjoy the performance by Mr. Dick Lee.

II Performance

A mini-concert was held featuring Mr. Dick Lee's musical performance, in which he shared with the audience his sincere pursuit of music and his thoughts about Asia.

JAMES TENGAN (hereafter indicated as J): Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Dick Lee. Please welcome him with a round of applause.

J: Dick Lee, welcome to Fukuoka and congratulations on winning the award.

You have promoted Asian culture through music and through performance. These fans have been waiting since this morning. I think many of them traveled a long way to see you.



The setting on the stage is designed to look as if we were visiting Dick Lee in his living room. Let me have a seat here and enjoy the performance with the audience. Dick, please stand by.

Dick Lee (hereafter indicated as D): I'm going to start by playing a song from my new album called "Rice." It's an instrumental album, and I would like to play a piece called "Celadon."

(♪CELADON♪)

(♪ASIA MAJOR♪)

D: Today, I will tell you a little bit about how I went on my Asian journey.

I come from Singapore, and Singapore is a multi-racial country. Therefore, I grew up with many different cultures side by side, taking such different cultures for granted. Singapore is a part of Malaya and it was one of the Malay states. For this reason, the national language of Singapore was, and still is Malay. Singapore was also a British colony at one time, so British English was widely spoken and has also remained as our official language. I grew up with all these influences and no real strong sense of myself.

I knew I wanted to write songs but I didn't know where to start. I wasn't so comfortable with Malay. I can't speak Chinese. And if I sang in English, it would be as if I was trying to copy English people.

The music I listened to as a child varied widely. My mother would listen to Chinese pop songs. My father was a Jazz fan and particularly liked big band Jazz, such as the Glenn Miller Orchestra and other American big band music. These musical varieties surrounded us at home all the time.

Here is an example of a Chinese pop song that my mother loved and played all the time at home.

(♪WO WO NI NI♪)



D: I actually recorded this song for my album “Mad China Man” because it had left such a strong impression in my mind.

Another song that I also listened to a lot in school was this song called “Little White Boat.” We learned and sang it in Chinese, but it actually is a Korean song. I’ve put English words to it.

(♪LITTLE WHITE BOAT♪)

D: A very simple song, isn’t it? I think I was about seven or eight years old when I first sang this song. I used to love all the singing lessons we had at school, but I didn’t like piano lessons.

My mother won a piano in a lottery. One day, the piano appeared in my house and I was forced to take piano lessons. I was very angry with my mother but now I thank her from the bottom of my heart for making me take the piano lessons.

I realize that Singapore is a very young country and we have no folk songs of our own. I would feel very lucky and happy if the music I’m making would become the folk songs for my country in the future.

So, here is a song I wrote for a musical called “Kampong Amber.” When the president of Singapore saw the musical, he liked it so much that he asked for it to be adopted as a national song.

(♪BUNGA SAYANG♪)

J: Dick, could you tell us what “Bunga Sayang” means? Where does this title come from?

D: It’s a Malay word. ‘Bunga’ is a flower and ‘sayang’ is love. So, it means the ‘Flower of Love.’

Now, I’m going to sing a song that started my music career when I was sixteen years old. I wrote this song myself. Professor Fujii was talking about Singlish -- that is Singapore English. In Singapore, we say, ‘Yeah-lah’ (yes), or ‘No-lah’ (no). That’s Singlish. I tried to write a song that was truly Singaporean and that didn’t copy anybody else’s work. So I wrote the song using a lot of Singlish in it.

And this song is the song that got me my first record deal 30 years ago. “Fried Rice Paradise.”

(♪FRIED RICE PARADICE♪)

D: This album, recorded in 1989 and 1990, changed my life.

I recorded several albums in the 80’s as I was trying to find my way in music in all of these albums. What I was doing then was mainly copying a lot of western styles.

And in 1989, I had the offer to release one last album. So, I thought, “OK, I’ll do this

one last one.”

I thought I would try any kind of music that I wanted since this was going to be my last album. Therefore, I decided to put in a lot of music that had influenced me and made me what I am. I put in a lot of Chinese pop songs, Malay pop songs, Indian songs, and all kinds of music that I grew up with.

The album that embraced all of those was “The Mad Chinaman.”

(♪THE MAD CHINAMAN♪)



D: When I came to Japan with the “The Mad Chinaman” album, I suddenly became the ambassador for Asia. It was 1990, and everybody was very surprised to know that Singapore had such a man like myself. It seemed that Japan, at least, was very surprised to see someone like me who comes from Singapore. And I said, “Well, it’s nothing special. I’m just an Asian like you. We are all Asians.”

We are all the same. Although Japan is an island country, we are from the same continent, aren’t we? We may have different cultures but we share a common spirit, which is Asian.

And this spirit derives from ‘rice,’ which is why I named the next album “Rice.”

In “Asia Major,” the next album following “The Mad Chinaman,” I decided to do what I did in “The Mad Chinaman,” which was to take old songs and make them new. So, I made one in a Japanese style.

(♪SUKIYAKI♪)

D: That was “Sukiyaki.”

While I studied a lot about different music in Asia and traveled all over Asia, the country, or the island that really inspired me the most was Bali. I loved the music of the Gamelan and I found it so familiar. It wasn’t long before I realized that the music of Bali, or the scale of the Gamelan was exactly the same as the scale of the Shamisen. For example, in “Celadon,” my first piece in “Asia Major,” I use a lot of the Balinese scale. Listen to this.



(♪Musical Scale♪)

Doesn’t it sound like Japanese music? This is a Balinese scale. Next time you listen to Gamelan music, I’m sure you will recognize a touch of Japanese music.

In 1993, I wrote a musical called “Nagrland,” which was inspired by Bali. So, here is a love song from “Nagrland.”

(♪NAGRALAND♪)

D: Traveling around in Asia has also awoken the Chinese side of me. In Hong Kong, I was able to meet with a very famous Singaporean, Sandy Lam. I invited her to sing “Lover’s Tears” from my album, and we became really great friends after that. She invited me to be her guest performer in her first very big concert in Hong Kong. I felt very proud when I was standing on the stage in front of 6,000 people in the audience in Hong Kong. I thought that my mother would be very happy because she always wanted me to be a Chinese pop singer. After that, I worked with many other Chinese pop singers and one of the most famous ones I worked with was Leslie Cheung. The news of his suicide was very sad. But we will always miss him. And I’d like to dedicate this song to him, which I wrote for his movie.

(♪THE SEARCH OF MY LIFE♪)

D: That was for Leslie...

I’ve worked quite a lot in the Chinese music industry recently and I’ve noticed that their music is becoming increasingly sophisticated. And one of the most sophisticated Chinese pop singers from Singapore is here in Fukuoka now. Tanya Chua. She’s here to perform on stage at 7 o’clock tomorrow for the Asian Month festival. She’s a very talented singer.



I have written many songs about Singapore. And I would like to do this one now, which I wrote in Japan when I became homesick for Singapore.

(♪SINGAPORE NIGHTS♪)

J: Thank you, Dick. By the way, how do you maintain your youthful looks so well?

D: That’s my secret. Well actually, I don’t do anything in particular regarding skin care. I just use soap and water, and the only thing I do is just color my hair.

Here is a song about Asia called “Modernasia.”

(♪MODERNASIA♪)

D: The next song is something that I’m very proud of because I performed it in the presence of the Emperor and Empress of Japan in Osaka for the Namihaya Kokutai.

(♪WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD♪)

III Charity Auction

A Charity Auction was held for items which were private possessions of Dick Lee and included one of his out-of-print records. Five avid fans made successful bids and profits were donated to the Exchange Students Scholarship Fund managed by the Fukuoka International Association.



Items included in the five auctions:



A Dick Lee record released when he was 23 and is now out-of-press.



A notebook and a portrait with Dick Lee's autograph.



A necklace and a bracelet set Mr. Dick Lee wore as an amulet during the 1990 "The Mad Chinaman" Concert.



A set of a poster and T shirt for the 1990 "The Mad Chinaman" Concert.



A set of a man's shirt designed by Dick Lee himself and a metal pin for the "Asia Major."

IV Last Song



J: Now, here is the last song from Dick Lee.

(♪MIAGETE♪)

D: Thank you very much.

J: Please give Dick Lee a warm round of applause. Thank you very much, Dick. It is not Japan and Asia, but in fact, Japan with the rest of Asia. I'm sure Dick's message that Japan is part of Asia was brought home to everyone tonight. Thank you very much for coming.

* The above text summarizes the concert by Mr. Dick Lee, the Arts and Culture Prize laureate of the 14th Fukuoka Asian Culture Prizes 2003.