

Opening Remarks
Salon Concert
Consul General George Hisaeda
June 1, 2011

Good evening everyone. Midori and I are delighted to welcome you to the Official Residence of the Consul General of Japan.

As most of you know, we lived in Winnetka for one year while this Residence was fully renovated. Many of the improvements are hidden such as new electrical wiring, heating, and plumbing. Of course, you can see the new carpet, paint, and draperies. The two powder rooms on this level have been remodeled, and two large restrooms were added downstairs.

For Midori and me, the most significant change was the windows. They were removed, carefully restored by hand, and a second glass pane was added. Since we kept the original wood frames, we still feel a slight draft but the gusts of wind are gone.

While we were away, two new houses suddenly appeared out the back window. Fortunately, there is a tiny gap between them so we can still see Lake Michigan.

I've now been in Chicago for nearly 3 years and I have hosted many events at this Residence.

Normally, I would now talk about this evening's event. But let me first mention something else.

Ever since the unprecedented disaster, the earthquake and the tsunami, the United States has been at the forefront in providing relief.

As Japan's most important ally, the United States immediately sent ships and aircraft for search and rescue. It delivered food, water, blankets, and medical supplies. And it provided nuclear experts. At Sendai Airport, the U.S. military rebuilt the damaged runway. Across America, huge funds are being donated.

In the Chicago area, many fundraising concerts and other events are being held. And companies and individuals are giving generously. Japan will never forget your contribution.

Every time Japan has faced disaster, it has rebounded and become even stronger. I'm certain that we will do it again, with your friendship and support.

You may have heard some people say Japanese products and food are not safe, and visiting Japan is risky.

They are wrong. Japan is safe to visit, safe for business, and its products are safe. Please tell your family, friends, and colleagues.

This evening, we have Japanese food for you, and some of the ingredients may have come from Japan. Don't worry. They are absolutely, positively safe. They have passed the world's toughest, strictest, and unfriendliest test conducted at U.S. ports.

Tonight's highlight is a special concert. I know all of you are music lovers just like me. And I'm thrilled that in the audience, we have two important guests, who are world-renowned, virtuoso brass players: Jay Friedman, trombonist and Rex Martin, tubist. It is a great honor for me to have them here.

I know they are both fans of Japanese food, and they always enjoy performing in Japan and sometimes holding master classes there. I'm sure they would not hesitate to visit Japan again.

All of this reminds me of my school days when I chose the trombone over other brass instruments.

One day, my 90-year-old, great grandmother saw my cousin perform in a wind orchestra in her small village near Hiroshima. She was dismayed. She thought his trumpet was too small. It brought shame upon her prosperous family. She immediately ordered his parents to buy a larger, flashier instrument like the trombone, euphonium, or even the tuba.

This story helped me fall in love with the trombone. It looked great! When my parents bought my trombone, they remembered my great grandmother.

Maybe I've said too much about the trombone. But remember, all brass players love the brass sound. And I hope all of you will as well.

This evening, I'm thrilled to hold a trumpet concert here for the first time. As Consul General, I've always believed it is my responsibility to present promising young Japanese musicians to a broader audience. And that's what I'm doing tonight.

Ms. Eriko Shibata will perform on the trumpet. And Ms. Mamiko Yasuda-Larsen, will accompany her on the piano. She also plays the trumpet. They were classmates at Japan's most prestigious

music school, Tokyo University of the Arts. They are very good friends, and thankfully for us they now live in Chicago.

I believe our two musicians are in the dressing room now, and cannot hear my next comment. I don't want to make them too nervous.

Jay and Rex, they are so brave to perform in front of you. I've been playing the trombone for decades. And I would never allow you to hear me play.

Please listen with a critical ear, and don't hesitate to critique their performance in private. Few young musicians have such a tremendous opportunity.

Let's enjoy the concert. Thank you all for coming.