Nikolaus Harnoncourt, reception and reputation in Japan

Dies irae, dies illa ~ as a self-introduction

It was a day in May 1983; I was an employee of a middle-class trading company in Japan. On a whim, during a short lunch break, I went to the disc store in Osaka without taking lunch. I was in the mood for Mozart, very new Mozart.
I was a Mozart freak in those days, of course he is still an eternal idol of mine.
I was looking for him in a new aspect.
Karajan, Böhm, Suitner and of course Walter, I was a listener to the great masters of Mozart interpretation of the time. But sometimes I couldn't accept their rich but too slow tempi. It was good only for an afternoon nap.

I found a vinyl disc with a green cover showing the inside of a concert hall.

"Nikolaus Harnoncourt, yes, I know him, but as a guru of the Baroque Ensemble"

OK, I bought this Jupiter Symphony disc without any filler tunes, with great anticipation and a little suspicion.

That was my first close encounter with Nikolaus Harnoncourt (hereafter NH).

Since then, I have been listening to his music and words and watching his pictures and videos for about 40 years. But in Japan, he was not a popular figure in classical music, especially before his second visit in the mid-2000s.

I want to find out how Japanese audiences perceive and appreciate him. I will do this through a chronological study of old issues of Japanese music magazines.

1950s to 1960s ~ appeared as the founder of an orchestra

We have two popular classical music magazines in Japan.

One is "Ongaku no Tomo" (Music Friend), which has concert information and reviews or criticism.
The other is "Record Geijutsu" (Art of the Disc) for disc release information and criticism.

As far as I can tell, the earliest article on NH appeared in the June 1958 issue of Record Geijutsu (hereafter RG) as a foreign report, as follows.

"A new chamber orchestra, Concentus Musicus, has been founded in Vienna under the direction of Nikolaus Harnoncourt, with the aim of performing early music on the period instruments in which it was composed"

The first disc released in Japan was "Kammermusik am Mannheimer Hof" SR-1045 King Records (Telefunken's Japanese agent at the time), advertised in RG 1965 January issue.

After that, not all, but several releases followed with German Telefunken. There were also a few on the "Gramophone Archiv" label. But the labels "Vanguard" and "Amadeo" releases were not available until the 1970s or much later.

The critics were almost welcoming of this newcomer and not yet so controversial. So, NH would have been given the title of ensemble leader for pre-Bach music in the record industry.

> Speaking of myself, this period is before I was born or in my childhood. Of course I didn't know the name NH, nor was I interested in classical music itself.
>
> Digging deeper into the back issues this time, I found an interesting topic from this period in which some critics wrote something that now seems rather old-fashioned, saying that NH's Bach Overtures disc was very boring and that those of us who know the Berlin Philharmonic and the Steinway don't see the point of such a leisurely performance on old instruments. A reader refuted in a letter column that these critics were ignorant and that the beauty of NH's music could be appreciated by listening to it many times.

We would like to recount here how 'Harnoncourt' is called and described in Japan in chronological order.

In the first introductory article in 1958, he was described 'Arunonkuuru' [ar.noŋ.kuːɾɯ], according to the French pronunciation [ar.nɔ̃.kuʁ].
After the discs were released, two companies used different names, Telefunken-King as 'Haanonkooruto' [haː.noŋ.koːr.to] or 'Harunonkooruto' [har.noŋ.koːr.to] and Archiv as 'Arunonkuuru' [ar.noŋ.kuːɾɯ] or 'Harunonkuuru' [harˌnoŋ.kuːɾɯ].

This chaotic situation lasted until the end of the 1970s, when the two companies merged under the name 'Harunonkuuru' [harˌnoŋ.kuːɾɯ]. But it didn't last long. Some critics advocated 'Aanonkuuru' [aː.noŋ.kuːɾɯ] on the pretext that they had heard it straight from NH's own mouth. From the 1980s to the present day, almost all Japanese have referred to him as 'Aanonkuuru' [aː.noŋ.kuːɾɯ], except for NHK, which insisted on calling him 'Arunonkuuru' [ar.noŋ.kuːɾɯ] as the correct French pronunciation until around 2000.

The name described is very important in perceiving a person. If two people call or describe a person differently, how can they continue a dialogue? In Japan, such a situation went on for at least 20 years, when people talked about NH. How could they recognize and receive him correctly?

1970s ~ Il cimento del curiosità e dell'arbitrarietà

The concert review magazine "Ongaku no Tomo" was still silent during this period, although it had a small disc review column in which NH appeared several times, because NH and Concentus musicus were unknown to concert-goers. At the time, no concert promoter had any plans to invite them.

In Japan, the tastes of concertgoers and record maniacs often diverge. So, although these two magazines were published by the same company, they were aimed at slightly different readers.

RG, on the other hand, has always published recommendation articles soon after foreign releases, slightly before domestic releases, reviews after releases, and finally comparisons with foreign magazines for the top picks.

We were able to listen to the important early recordings such as "Monteverdi Trilogy", "St. Matthew Passion", "Mass in B minor", "Christmas Oratorio", "Brandenburg Concertos" (for some reason released much later than in Europe) etc. during this period. In addition, the renowned recordings of all the Bach cantatas have begun. They were almost well received by critics here, although there were some complaints about the strange taste or strong flavour of NH's renditions.

And finally, it all happened with the release of Vivaldi's "Four Seasons".

King Records (Telefunken's agent in Japan) proudly promoted this sensational release for 3 months. The first month with the slogan "...is violent Four Seasons", "...is sharp Vivaldi" by a famous composer and critic. The second month with NH's own commentary. The third with listeners' impressions collected through letters.

Critical reactions have been mixed, both pro and con.

The critic involved in the aforementioned promotion, as well as the young scholars, supported the idea of the NH, while the older moderates, who insisted on finding what they called beauty and comfort in music, criticised it.

In addition, the reputation of NH was more or less affected by the polite and rude comments of one musicologist who was the leading authority on music before the Baroque and Renaissance. This musicologist had been influenced by August Wenzinger and perhaps saw NH as Wenzinger's potential successor, but in his eyes, NH lacked Wenzinger's grace and precision. He also hated Vivaldi and couldn't understand why NH had gone mad over something like Vivaldi. As a conclusion, this musicologist used the title of Vivaldi's op. 8 to ridicule NH.

"The contest between Curiosity and Arbitrariness" (RG 1978 November issue)

At that time, I was listening to GDR artists such as Konwitschny, Suitner, Masur or Blomstedt and was not so involved in this controversy. Of course, I was aware of this dispute and may have read this musicologist's review.

As a man who naturally rebels against authority, I remember happily listening to this "Four Seasons" and laughing out loud, even though I didn't understand, or try to understand, what NH was up to.

The said musicologist is Tatsuo Minagawa (1927-2020), a man of real dignity and nobility. His beautiful writing is witty and courteous, but sometimes sarcastic, and while he respects other people's positions, he does not pander and gently but harshly expresses his own opinions. I often have the feeling that I've picked beautiful flowers that are actually poisonous.

For example, in the November 1978 issue (p. 137) of RG, he reviewed Vivaldi's Four Seasons ***"conducted, thankfully, by that highly acclaimed master Harnoncourt"***, and when someone asked him if he liked it, his response was: ***"First, smile and look the person in the eye, 'You ask so,***

but do you like it?' I always tried to avoid the question by answering gently and modestly".

He further wrote of this recording by ***"Nikolaus Harnoncourt in question"*** on the occasion of its re-release to coincide with NH's first visit to Japan in the July 1980 issue of RG (p. 127): ***"It was very unfortunate for this disc, for Harnoncourt and Vivaldi, and for me"*** that he was asked to review it, and referring to some of the rave reviews for this recording: ***"I have every respect for those who approve of this performance, and I have no intention of complaining about it. I do feel some resistance to the irresponsible way of saying that this is the only way to perform Baroque music, but I think that's only because the pen has slipped a little too far in favour of this performance"*** he said.

On the other hand, he also questioned NH's excessive methods, which he felt were outside the scope of his own aesthetic sense: ***"Having listened to Harnoncourt's performances, both live and on disc, for over twenty years, I simply cannot accept that his performance of The Four Seasons represents his true talent. Of course, I am not saying that it is false. I certainly have no intention of suggesting that it is a pretentious performance, trying to be as different as possible from other discs of The Four Seasons. If one were to ask Harnoncourt himself, I have no doubt that he would reply, 'That is why, for me, this is the only ONE but TWO and unique of the THREE Continents FOUR Seasons, and it flows from the depths of my heart'"***, and not only that, but he even began to suspect a conspiracy by the record industry: ***"I can't help feeling that a political fixer, mastermind or double has intervened in Harnoncourt's recording of The Four Seasons. Of course, this is just the ramblings of a student of music history on an isolated island in the East, so it doesn't really bother Harnoncourt, and it in no way diminishes the positive reviews of the recording of The Four Seasons"***.

Finally he concluded this time by boasting like: ***"If you were to ask me whether I would criticise my previous attitude and enthusiastically welcome this disc, my answer would be: 'No matter what you think, it's Vivaldi after all, and one listen is enough'... well, it's a very simple matter"***.

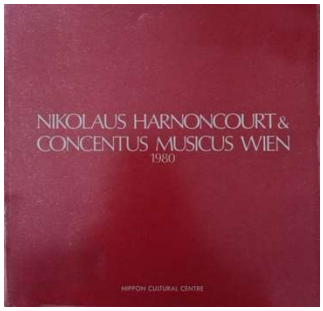
In the end, I couldn't understand his real intention. Was it paradoxical support for an up-and-coming musician? Or was it just disgust with Vivaldi and/or NH?

Either way, his review alienated a lot of very strait-laced listeners from NH and also brought a lot of curious listeners to NH. If that was Minagawa's intention, then his review was spot on.

A similar situation arose with the release of Handel's "Water Musick". But fortunately, or unfortunately, the musicologist in question was not in charge of the review.

And NH came to Japan for the first time in late 1980.

Early 1980s ~ towards Mozart



NH's first Japan tour with the Concentus musicus Wien (hereafter CMW) was nationwide.

Nevertheless, perhaps the promotion wasn't enough, and people weren't interested in Baroque music other than the works of Bach and Vivaldi, and a few other famous pieces that had been performed many times by "I Musici". This tour didn't raise enough awareness of NH and CMW. It's impossible in today's Japan, where all the music promoters ask the artists to make a programme of typical famous works, but Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" was not played. If The Four Seasons had been performed at that time, the situation would have been completely different, but that's an another world. We have to respect NH's intention at that time — the possibility is there that he thought, “We're not ‘I Musici’”.

"Ongaku no Tomo" was still silent except for small concert reviews with picture, but RG and other magazines such as "Ongaku Gendai" (Music Modernity) and "Stereo Geijutsu" (Art of the Stereo) published interview articles. This may have been the first time NH's idea and/or intention was introduced to a Japanese audience.

My biggest regret is that I missed his first tour of Japan and the recording of the radio broadcast. I heard that NHK had already erased the tape of the Tokyo concert.

And NH finally moved on to Mozart. Although his first Mozart disc had been "Idomeneo" in Europe, here in Japan this excellent opera box set was released a year later in 1982.
We first encountered NH's Mozart in late 1981 with the symphony disc "Haffner" & No. 34.
The reviews all sounded indecisive, checking the opinions of others. The said noble musicologist in question was not at the helm this time. That was one of the reasons, but the typical Japanese tendency to avoid arguments and remain on the same level as others was evident.

After that, there was a rush to release Mozart discs, and at the same time Bach's Brandenburg and Orchestral Suites were re-recorded.
The critics may have been forced to follow the disc company's momentum and sales.

As I mentioned at the beginning, it was around this time that I became aware of NH.
I listened and listened to the disc of the Jupiter Symphony every day and found something extravagant every time. Sometimes I felt Mahler's orchestration in it. At first I thought NH had made some changes to the orchestration.
I had not understood NH's reading of the music, but his output left me in awe and laughing my head off because it was too different from existing performances.
I wanted to know his methods, but I couldn't find them in Japanese music magazines.
In the first place, Japanese criticism at that time was mostly personal opinion without any musicological backing and often created booklets based on their own ideas and insights, in other words, a lot of things were subjective and arbitrary, with people deciding things based on what they liked and disliked.
While the record booklets in Europe contained a lot of information and explanations, it was impossible to understand NH’s intentions in Japan.

Karl Böhm died in the summer of 1981.
The transition from the old to the new Mozart conductor was thus both solemn and dramatic.

Karl Böhm's reputation, especially as a Mozart conductor, was enormous at the time in Japan. Even when he did not have a good command of the orchestra, the Japanese audience received him with the highest applause.

They probably knew they were being exploited. But they still idolized Dr. Böhm and tried to find temporary happiness. They still didn't have enough opportunities to watch and listen to different performances to develop an aesthetic sense.

The last interview with Dr. Böhm by "Stern" (dated 20 August 1981) was translated into Japanese, this time by OT, October 1981 issue.
In it, Dr. Böhm refused NH as a Mozart conductor and wished to be refused by NH.
I looked at this article and felt a touch of loneliness and the arrival of a new era.

Curiously enough, Karl Böhm was born in Graz, where NH spent his early years.

Late 1980s ~ Acute osteitis of the palate

General NH's advance continued.
His Mozart repertoire expanded to include all the famous symphonies, serenades, mature operas except Così and Figaro (both of which he had already played in Zurich), and sacred masses including the Requiem, Coronation and Great Mass in C Minor.
Moreover, he went beyond Mozart to Haydn, Schubert and Johann Strauss.

During this period, “Ongaku Gendai” played a small role in explaining and sharing NH's ideas with its readers.
For example, in the September 1987 issue, NH was interviewed by his two Japanese students; in the February and March 1988 issues, two chapters from "Musik als Klangrede" (Residenz Verlag, 1982) were translated by one of them.

This was the first time I had read NH's own writing apart from various liner notes. I hadn't noticed the book itself, but I came across the name "Musik als Klangrede" and bought it in early 1989 at the latest. The students mentioned above were Masayuki Honda and Tsutomu Nasuda, who are now a conductor and a critic respectively. As previously mentioned, Nasuda, the latter translated two chapters (“Die Musik in unserem Leben” and “Gedanken eines Orchestermusikers zu einem Brief von W. A. Mozart”) from “Musik als Klangrede”. They also co-translated "Der musikalische Dialog" (Residenz Verlag, 1984), NH's second book. Although I don't know them personally, I

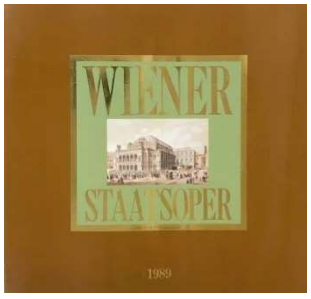
trust their reviews and translations, and their work has played an important role in establishing NH's reputation in Japan. "Musik als Klangrede" was translated by others much later, in 1997, and is a little difficult to read.

Anyway, I read the book in German and English and immediately asked my friends, amateur players, to form a chamber orchestra to play together according to NH's method. This went on for three years, and at times we felt we were doing a good job, but due to the busyness of our own jobs and differences in our way of thinking, it was difficult to continue.
Looking back, regardless of our own incompetence, we were able to imitate his methods to some extent. I can clearly see that NH tried to make his methods public rather than keep them secret.

He was truly an enlightener.

Telefunken-Teldec was acquired by Warner Bros., and at the same time the Japanese distributor changed from King to Warner Japan in 1988.

In March 1988, NH premiered Mozart's Magic Flute at the Vienna State Opera. It was chaos. There were boos and bravos, and the second act did not get off to a good start.
This was reported by "FM fan", the radio programme information magazine of 02 May 1988. Reporter admired NH enthusiastically: "The sight of him enduring the criticism of the entire audience gives him the awe of a martyr".
The actual broadcast also brought this tense scene to life.



Finally, the Vienna State Opera's tour to Japan in November 1989 was announced. Naturally, NH's Magic Flute was on the programme, with five performances scheduled for the 3rd, 5th, 6th, 8th and 10th November.

But he didn't come. Cancelled.

The reason is illness, acute osteitis of the palate.
Hans Graf was his replacement.

I decided to go to Vienna right away.

Maybe he didn't want to come to Japan. If so, going to listen to his performance was the only way.

In next June, I went and listened to the Magic Flute in Vienna. It happened to be the last performance of his Magic Flute there. To my goodness, there was no booing at all.

Early 1990s ~ Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann and, of course, Mozart and Schubert

The bicentenary of Mozart's death was celebrated with great pomp in 1991. Naturally, NH was the central figure in the celebrations.
He has continued to expand the Mozart repertoire and re-recorded the last three symphonies live as a trophy for the bicentenary. This was well received by Japanese critics and listeners because it was rather more cautious than the first recordings with the Concertgebouw.

And to Beethoven!

All nine symphonies were recorded live at the styriarte festival in Graz in 1990 and 1991. This may be the first performance and recording that was accepted by everyone, not only in Japan, but all over the world. Continues with "Missa solemnis" and violin concerto with Gidon Kremer. As for the Violin Concerto, the cadenza by Kremer himself was argued, and the Missa solemnis was criticised for being too slow.

On to Mendelssohn, NH was ahead.
Symphonies Nos. 3 & 4 disc was well appreciated by Japanese critics.

By this time, I had almost stopped reading the review pages, because it seemed to me that critics were uncomfortable with NH's performances of famous masterpieces that had been recorded many times before, but appreciated the other, less familiar pieces and thought it was OK.
So, I only read reviews written by critics I trusted. I re-read some of the whole reviews this time, but I still couldn't find any meaningful reviews that would overturn my perception.

During this period, I visited Austria twice. The first time was at the Graz styriate in 1992, and the second at the Salzburg Festival in 1994. Having decided to listen to NH there, I honestly didn't care about his reputation in Japan. His sound, when I actually listened to it, was like magic that couldn't

be contained on a disc, and I was tired of reviews that only scratched the surface.
In particular, the series of performances at the styriarte in 1992 under the motto “A Midsummer Night's Dream” was a precious experience that I will never forget, perhaps because it took place on our honeymoon. Even when the cadenza of Beethoven's Violin Concerto, which had been released on CD, was criticised, or the so-so reviews of Mendelssohn's A Midsummer Night's Dream, I didn't feel any pain or anger and had no interest. When the Schumann Concerto with Argerich came out later, I assumed it would be recommended because it was Argerich, and it turned out to be true, so I was put off.

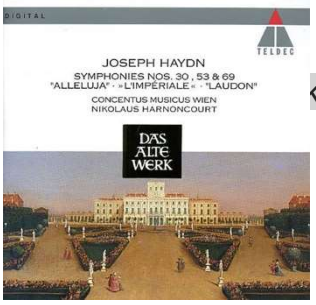
OT, the concert review magazine, was a bit mended to publish the article about NH's appearance at the famous music festivals.
For example, when he performed all of Beethoven's symphonies at the Salzburg Festival in 1994, he was featured in a colour photo spread, probably for the first time.

And NH started the Schumann cycle.
That was a matter of course, he was always moving forward in music history.
At the same time, NH has sought to enrich his repertoire, first recording of the complete Schubert symphonies in 1992, and then completing all of Mozart's mature operas with Le nozze di Figaro in 1993, both with the Concertgebouw.

Critics in RG, Schumann almost acceptable due to quite new atmosphere brought in by NH. Schubert similar. (Presumably they didn't know the symphonies other than "Unfinished" and "The Great") And as for Figaro, neither praise nor criticism, they just compared it to the old performances and got by.

But criticism aside, the magazine itself had to put an end to the underestimation of NH, which was evident from his first appearance on the cover of the December 1994 issue of RG. (Surprisingly, his pin-up poster had already been included in the June 1972 issue to announce the start of the integral Bach cantatas)

By the end of 1992 at the latest, I had decided to change careers, because I realized that I was not suited to trading or dealing, or rather that I hated it even more. It all started with this CD, or rather everything would have been fine as long as it was a NH's CD. As soon as I listened to it, tears started to flow, and I couldn't stop. I still believe that its greatness taught me my mistake.



Haydn: Symphonies Nos. 30, 53 and 69
〈” 9031-76460-2

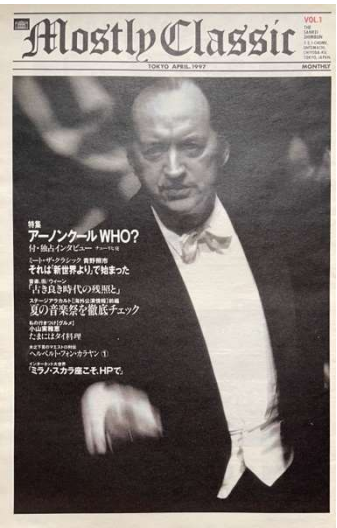
Late 1990s ~ still unknown to the general public

Bruckner and Brahms at last?
First a step towards Bruckner's 3rd symphony, then the complete Brahms symphonies, NH went on and on.
Critics began to use their own past abuses to make comparative criticisms: saying that NH was too tame than before, or that previous NH would not have done such things, etc.

What did they know?

Even more surprising was the fact that in a survey article published around this time (RG, March 1996 issue) with the grandiose headline "Who is the greatest conductor of the 20th century?", NH was ranked 14th by 58 critics and 34th by a readers' poll, showing that this was influenced by Japanese critics who were quite behind the times, and that Japanese audiences actually rated NH more conservatively than they did.

For the first time, NHK broadcast a series of subscription concerts from the 1996/97 season of the Berlin Philharmonic live, using its own equipment and personnel. NH's Brahms concert on 21. December 1996 was the first and was broadcast at least three times. This may have been the first contact with the general Japanese public.



My personal feeling at that time was that even among Japanese professional musicians, NH's recognition was 60% or less. As for ordinary people, it was very easy to imagine.
That reluctant OT also announced this broadcast (March 1997 issue), and the brand-new music paper "Mostly Classic" (the very first issue, April 1997) featured NH on the cover and in an interview article, but under the title "Harnoncourt Who?".

At that time, a critic defended and supported NH with his own unique rhetoric. For example, NH's assertive tone was like that of a con man, making even unsubstantiated statements seem true. However, we felt that if it made us happy to be deceived, then so be it. There is certainly some truth in this.
Early music fundamentalists have criticised NH's theory, saying that it lacks conclusive evidence and that the way the CMW play, the choice of instruments and the way they hold them are not authentic.
But this was not essential.
This would continue for a while because the Japanese like to pay attention to details.

More Bruckner and on to Dvořák, NH didn't stop.
In the case of Bruckner, pesky critics nitpicked the Concertgebouw's 3rd and 4th symphonies but praised the Vienna Philharmonic's 7th. In the case of Dvořák, on the other hand, critics who sympathized more with the symphonic poems than with the symphonies could be justified.

Finally, an article entitled "Why NH is not well received in Japan" with his long interview was published in the April 2000 issue of RG. However, this rather rude and frustrated article clearly showed NH's situation in Japan at that time. Firstly, he hadn't come to Japan for 20 years. Secondly, it suggested that Japanese audiences had always received European music passively, refusing to understand it intellectually but trying to master it physically.

Certainly.

Quite logical.

It is a very different way of perceiving music to NH's.

But it wasn't all headwinds. Thanks to an ingenious satellite radio producer, the styriarte concerts were broadcast continuously and almost in real time. Even now, it

can only be described as a miracle that we were able to listen to a concert of Wagner's works in Japan.

I visited Vienna again in 1997 and this time I was lucky enough to be able to watch his rehearsal. After the rehearsal I went to greet him, thinking I'd ask him a cheeky question, but in fact his aura was so amazing that I could only say hello and express my gratitude.

Berg's Violin Concerto with Gidon Kremer was an unforgettable, precious listening experience for me because it was not recorded commercially.

I next visited Zurich in 2000 to watch NH's Così and Fledermaus, but after that I couldn't go to Europe for a while.

Early 2000s ~ New Year concert twice

Despite his unpopularity in Japan, he was twice invited to perform at the Vienna Philharmonic's New Year's Concert in his home country, in 2001 and 2003. This was no surprise, given that in Austria he always came second or third in such rankings. He chose the music without pandering to the audience, and instead of ruining the New Year's atmosphere, he mixed in his usual humour.

In a break-in interview by NHK in 2001, he was asked why he hadn't visited Japan for so long, to which he replied: "I hate flying, so I can't go there very often, but I think a technological powerhouse like Japan could bring its islands closer to us".

I no longer wanted him to come to Japan. In fact, I thought that his music was meant to be listened to in a European atmosphere and that there was no way the Japanese would understand it.

Ironically, however, his reputation in Japan as a great conductor who frequently appeared at the New Year's Concert had suddenly grown, and not only that, but an invitation also to Japan was already being steadily and secretly prepared.

In 2002, NH was baptised by the laws of economics, not art. Teldec, which had a lifetime contract with NH was forced to close due to the sudden withdrawal of its parent company, Warner Bros., from the classical music market. Fortunately, he was able to sign a new contract with BMG-RCA a year later, but the global economy was becoming harsh on the arts, and even established artists like NH were struggling.

By the end of 2003, NH's Japan tour had been decided. Initially announced as a Salzburg Festival tour with Don Giovanni, it was eventually decided to be a tour with two different orchestras, the Vienna Philharmonic and the CMW.

I later heard that Kajimoto Music Agency, Japan's biggest music promoter, had been negotiating with him for 15 years, and finally in 2003 they organized an audience tour for styrialte and went on a massive pilgrimage to get him to perform in Japan.
When I first heard about it, I thought it was very Japanese and unpleasant, but when I later heard the story directly from Kajimoto's representative, I understood why NH was so touched by it, given his sincere attitude.

And suddenly, in late autumn 2005, he came to Japan for the first time in 25 years as a Kyoto Prize Laureate.

In hindsight, if the award is given to individuals who have made significant contributions to science or culture, regardless of their fame, then based on that philosophy, it is certainly fitting that he received it. However, given the timing, one might suspect that it was related to his tour of Japan the following year. At the time, I knew nothing about the Kyoto Prize itself. I didn't know why he had been chosen or by whom. I didn't think he would come in the first place, especially since he hadn't come to conduct the Vienna opera. In fact, I even called the secretariat several times to confirm that he was really coming.

Late 2000s ~ Japan tour twice

For the first time, NH conducted a Japanese orchestra, the Kyoto Philharmonic. As a presentation workshop for the Kyoto Prize ceremony in 2005.

I listened to the workshop from the audience. NH rehearsed in English and performed Mozart's B-flat Major Symphony, KV 319.
I learned this later that some orchestral players who played under NH didn't know him before but found his style very interesting. They understood NH's intentions promptly and were able to react accordingly. This is not only because they are flexible, but above all NH's

instructions were adequate and humorously moving.
For exemple, in the second movement, NH explained the different phrases in terms of the relationship between Harlequin and his partner.
The two days of study with NH were a valuable opportunity for us all, and were reported in various media, including newspapers, magazines and TV.
As a result, it made a great trailer for next year's tour.

On the other hand, I found out the following article this time.

"***In tribute to the Kyoto Prize, which is gaining a reputation comparable to that of the Nobel Prize, the maestro cancelled his November schedule and visited Kyoto. To accommodate this, the November performances were rescheduled for May 2006. A concert that had been scheduled for that period, involving a live recording with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, was postponed. While it is unfortunate that the opportunity to listen to the intriguing programme 'Woman in Madness', featuring works by Wagner, Brahms and Berg, has been postponed*** (actually cancelled)***, we are delighted that his visit to Japan has been brought forward to coincide with next year's Harnoncourt Week".***

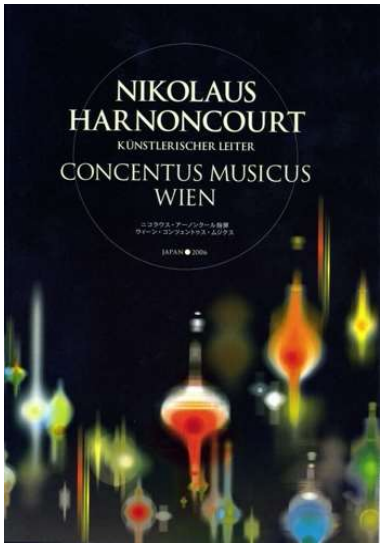
Information about an upcoming new release was also provided.
R. Strauss:
'Death and Transfigurations'
Wagner:
Tristan und Isolde 'Prelude and Liebestod'
and others
Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra

Okamoto, Minoru (Reporter).
Special coverage: Nikolaus Harnoncourt's visit to Japan
- Harnoncourt in Kyoto: His first visit to Japan in a quarter century.
Record Geijutsu: the February 2006 issue pp. 18-20
ONGAKU NO TOMO SHA CORP., Tokyo

Unfortunately, the rescheduling meant that he had to cancel his guest appearance with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in May 2006,

resulting in the cancellation of a concert and recording programme of works by Wagner, Richard Strauss and others.

OT, a concert review magazine that had been almost silent about NH, finally made a big step forward. For almost a year, from the report on the Kyoto Prize in the January 2006 issue to the report on the Japan tour in the February issue of the following year, it gave detailed coverage to NH's activities in Austria etc. under the title "This Month's Harnoncourt" and supported the Japan tour.
On the other hand, RG kept to itself, only enthusiastically recommending the vast quantities of CDs being reissued to coincide with his visit to Japan or looking back at previous reviews in the magazine and examining Don Giovanni, whose reputation had changed with each reissue. This campaign was not only intended to flatter his visit to Japan; it was also, in a sense, an honest admission of their own lack of foresight.



In 2006, he came to Japan again as promised.
His tour with the Vienna Philharmonic and the CMW was a great success.

The programme was as follows:

With Vienna Philharmonic
• Bruckner: Symphony No. 5
• Mozart: Symphony No. 39
  + Beethoven: Symphony No. 7
• Schumann: Symphony No. 3
  + Beethoven: Symphony No. 7
• Mozart: The Last three Symphonies

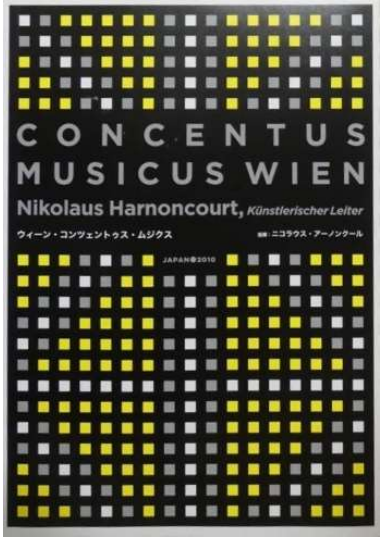
With CMW
• Mozart: Vesperae KV 321 + Requiem KV 626
• Handel: Messiah
• Bach: Overture No. 1 + Concerto for Ob. & Vn
  + Three Sinfonias from Cantatas + Overture No. 4

My personal impression was great with the CMW, but not always good with the Vienna Philharmonic, especially Mozart. The rivalry with the Vienna

Philharmonic, which felt wonderful in Bruckner's 5th, sounded like an indigestible performance in Mozart's last three symphonies, where NH's intentions were not fully conveyed.
I couldn't listen to Beethoven and Schumann, which I very much regret.

After this marvellous tour, it seemed that the reception of Japanese audiences had become similar to that of European audiences. In addition, the spread of the Internet must have reduced the time lag in reputation.

In 2008 I went to the styriarte in Graz for the first time in 16 years. It was Idomeneo. It seemed to me that I was travelling to a retrospective of the 1980s, when NH first recorded it. But this time with the CMW.



In 2010, the miracle happened again.
This time the Japan tour took place with the CMW only. Perhaps influenced by the Lehman shock, the hall was not quite full, but musically it was once again a great success.

The programme was as follows:

- Bach: The Great Mass in b minor
- Haydn: The Creation
- Mozart: Posthorn-Serenade
  + Symphony No. 35 “Haffner” (Originally vice versa)

I couldn't attend to the days of “The Creation”.

I kept a note of my impressions at the time.

Bach: Mass in B minor on 26 October 2010.
It's a new frontier... this.

It has absolutely no sharp edges. As a long-time listener, I can't help but feel confused.

The so-called “rich flavour”, which was also present in the Messiah on his previous visit to Japan, unfolded throughout almost the entire performance.

Or, to take it a step further, he embodied Bach with the sensuality of Richard Strauss and the decadence of Alban Berg.

NH seems to be in a state of considerable physical decline, and in interviews for the programme brochure he boasts of wanting to prepare properly for death, so I can't help wondering, however insensitively, if he is using his own "old age” to rethink death thoroughly.

Mozart Programme on 02 and 03 November 2010.

The order of the pieces has been changed from the original announcement. The posthorn includes only the first march and Marie Wolf, the second oboist, switches to the sopranino recorder for the final Minuetto – Trio I (with earplugs!), while the first trumpet, Andreas Lackner plays the posthorn for Trio II. Haffner is played an eclectic version with flute and no clarinet (maybe NH allowed the clarinetists to return home as a kind of thoughtful considerations like “Farewell” by Haydn?).

The encore was KV571-6, a German dance with a Turkish trio. The violists play percussions because viola was not orchestrated on the score. I don’t know why but one lady violist was weeping.

The master is good! If you want to put it that way, he's fine. But he's no longer an extremist who keeps piling on the music. No wonder he's so popular with everyone these days. But the orchestra is really good. Not in a general sense, but as the persons completely under his command. There were a lot of accidents on the first day, but the second day was almost perfect. I was able to do the farewell “in Japan” from the balcony seats.

He chose these two pieces by Mozart as a sign of farewell to Japan and to the touring abroad.

Early 2010s ~ Dona nobis pacem

RG awarded its "prestigious" Record Academy Award to NH for the first time in 2010. It was Brahms' German Requiem (Recorded in 2007 but not released until 2010 even in Europe. The reason for the three-year delay is unknown, but it was not due to a time lag between Europe and Japan). If it had been 20 years earlier, it would have been false news.
On the OT, there were no special articles and reviews for the 2010 tour, which was very strange.

> Around this time, I couldn't help but notice that NH's life was coming to an end, and I unconsciously began to write incoherent notes like this.
> When I've been in constant contact with someone for more than half my life, even if I say I'm only interested in his music, I start to wonder about his personality...Or rather, I can't help wondering.
> You don't have to force yourself to come to Japan. How's your health?
> Or what's in that big black bag your wife always brings to the stage... and so on and so forth.
> No, that's not the point. I just want to listen to this person's music next year, and the year after, and even for a minute or a second longer.
> After all, he's the only person I've ever met who never stops trying to change for the better.

With the spread of the internet, the number of social media posts increased and it became possible to get information about artists in real time, both official and unofficial. This naturally led to a decline in the influence of print magazines, and out-of-date information was no longer of interest.
The strong yen at the time also boosted overseas travel, and Japanese audiences began to enjoy going to concerts abroad.

> It's a shame that I was only able to go to Austria twice during this period, but I think I was able to watch and listen to retrospective and essential programmes.

> In 2012, Salzburg, Mozart: Magic flute with the CMW. The CMW had now become like a guild of craftsmen. They had become the hands and feet of the NH, while at the same time working as independent craftsmen.

In 2014, Graz styriarte, Mozart: The last three symphonies as an Instrumental Oratorium.

This time we saw a very interesting scene other than the music itself.

Mozart's last three great symphonies are instrumental oratorium in three parts. To illustrate his theory, NH played Nos. 39 and 40 attacca in the first half and No. 41 Jupiter in the second half.

A viola player broke a string in the middle of No. 39, but NH continued to play. The viola player also respected NH's intention and continued to play to the end of No. 40 without changing the string.

Meanwhile, in the second half of No. 41, NH's wife, Alice, tied up the string because it had come loose. Perhaps out of pride as a player, it seemed as if Alice was admonishing NH for his lack of consideration for the said viola player in the first half.

He continued to change. In retrospect, perhaps his enjoyment of his association with the Vienna and Berlin Philharmonic Orchestras was a form of self-transformation. His collaboration with these two top orchestras was particularly well received in Japan. In 2015, he won his second Record Academy Award for his “Schubert Edition” with the Berlin Philharmonic. Despite wondering why it wasn't with CMW, it was very honourable for him.

Listeners have a right to choose the artists they listen to, but the reverse is also true. He transformed himself, and each time he sifted his listeners through unintended filters. This was true of Vivaldi, Mozart, Brahms and Bruckner.
Each time his listeners had to decide whether to follow him or not.
And had time allowed, he would probably have sifted us through Berg and Wagner as well.

But the time had come.

In December 2015, Nikolaus Harnoncourt was forced to retire due to physical problems, and he passed away shortly afterwards in March of the following year.

Et in saecula saeculorum ~ AI, stand for Archived Information?

“I started listening to him out of curiosity, and before I knew it, he had become my teacher in music, or rather in the way of life. For over 30 years he

has been my mentor, making my life interesting, sometimes difficult and generally enriching.
Are we sending him away? Absolutely not.
He leaves this world with no choice, hoping that the methodology he has left behind will work well as a system and that the culture will flourish for generations to come”.

This is a post I made soon after NH's death in 2016. It sounds plausible but makes no sense. Surely, we are just the ones left behind on earth. But what is the "methodology" he left behind, and who can reconstruct it?

I played the viola for 30 years or more after changing jobs in the early 1990s. For me, being able to play in a professional orchestra was a real miracle, and above all, being able to continue doing so for such a long time. Whenever I played, I always thought of how NH would play. Sometimes we did things the right way, but at other times I personally had to act in a way that went against my own and NH's ideals. I imagine that many performances in Europe are also completely different to NH's. But here in Japan, “Harnoncourtisation” hadn't begun yet!
Of course, my reflection or reconstruction of NH's idea may be wrong, or at best an imitation.
It may not be necessary for performers on an isolated island in the East, who have never been taught directly by him, to imitate his music.
So should his students reconstruct NH's music and carry on his will, or should AI derive Harnoncourt-like performance techniques and make recordings?

Of course not.

That's not what I meant in my post, and I don't think that's what NH was hoping for. Setting aside practical matters, he first questions common sense, investigates matters personally and then deliberates. The results of this process are naturally reflected in his actions. The way he expresses himself is, of course, unique and fascinating, which is what makes him so appealing.
Having carefully read the writings on NH left in Japan this time, I have confirmed and reconsidered my own thoughts. When I read them again next time, I may have a different opinion and write different things.

As for his reputation in Japan, there is already a divergence from reality, or rather a reversal, a backlash. The magazine Record Geijutsu went out of print in 2023 and

is now only available on the web, but in a separate volume of reviews published just before it went out of print, NH was praised as number one in 20% of the works he covered.

That's really weird.
Even if you take into account that critics are getting younger.

This is not something to be overjoyed about, as I have read enough of the opinions of fickle critics. If the wind is blowing in our favour, it means that the next moment it will be blowing against us. This is probably natural for those who see NH as a fad or a fashion.

I am very glad that Nikolaus Harnoncourt Centre has been opened and that the NH's way of thinking has been made public from various aspects. I would like to express my gratitude to those involved in this project who have once again inspired those of us who are left behind, to question, to rethink, to set policies and to take action, and I would like to savour the joy of once again travelling into the NH's way of thinking.

It is to be hoped that well-archived information, rather than artificial intelligence, will help us to communicate our thoughts from century to century.

With deep thoughts of Alice & Nikolaus Harnoncourt and their family,
Takaomi Negoro
June 2025, Osaka

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Record Geijutsu: http://id.ndl.go.jp/bib/000000024418
Ongaku no Tomo: http://id.ndl.go.jp/bib/000000002948
Ongaku Gendai: http://id.ndl.go.jp/bib/000000025748