

MESSAGE FROM CONSUL-GENERAL ITO TAKAKO

July 2020

Our “Wish Upon a Tanabata Star” social media campaign celebrating this year’s Tanabata Festival received wishes from many people and was a great success when it concluded on July 7. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who participated.

It was also on July 7 that I received my orders to return to Japan. I will complete my assignment as Consul-General of Japan in Toronto and go back to Japan in the middle of August. I will convey my farewell message the next time in this space, but in the meantime, I would like to ask for your continued support and guidance until my departure from Toronto.



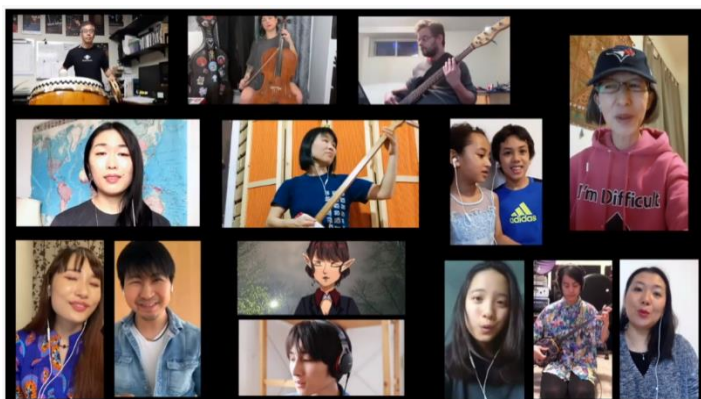
In the past month, the number of new COVID-19 cases in Ontario has been on a downward trend overall. The reopening of the economy has moved on to Stage 3 in many regions, and the general mood has been improving at this time when the province’s state of emergency seems close to being lifted. In the vicinity of the Consulate-General of Japan, traffic congestion has once again become noticeable during the morning rush hour, and there are more people enjoying meals on restaurant patios in the evenings.

However, given the recent surge of infections across the border in the United States, Canada remains cautious in the policies it adopts. The requirement of face masks in indoor public spaces and on transit is one of them. Considering how a vaccine or a cure still remains unavailable, I strongly urge you to continue taking preventative measures such as avoiding the three C’s – closed areas (poorly ventilated spaces), crowds and close contact with others – and washing your hands frequently. I feel a sense of pride that the concept of the three C’s, which originated in Japan, is now being put to use by the World Health

Organization and the City of Toronto's Medical Officer. I would be most pleased if this concept can help in preventing infections around the world.

It was under such circumstances that I received two videos featuring remote online performances.

The first was Suki-yaki Project Canada 2020 spearheaded by many members and supporters of the Japanese Canadian community. The video featured the song known outside Japan as "Suki-yaki" – "Ue Wo Muite Arukou" in Japanese ("I Keep My Head Up High") – editing together performances by volunteers who played various instruments and sang in Japanese with English subtitles.



Suki-yaki (Ue wo muite Arukou)
by Suki-yaki Project Canada 2020
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6Aan0ISnaI

Among them were faces I recognized from in and around Toronto, and I was deeply touched knowing they had participated in a project put together to encourage people through this difficult time. I also understood that the lyrics translated into English will help those who have lost family and loved ones to COVID-19 to find the courage they need to move forward despite their tearful anguish.

The other video came from taiko drum Master HAYASHI Eitetsu who toured Canada in 2018 as part of the celebrations commemorating the 90th anniversary of Japan-Canada diplomatic relations. He sent a touching message along with a performance of "Haru Yo Koi" or "Come, Spring", featuring six traditional Japanese musicians playing together remotely. This project was the idea of Master AGATSUMA Hiromitsu who last year came to Toronto to perform on the tsugaru shamisen as part of the piano-shamisen duo Aga-Shio. That these two musicians, who both have performed in Toronto as well as at Mississauga's Japan Festival CANADA in the past two years, participated in this wonderful project felt to me as if I'd received a special "song of support" for those of us who live in the GTA.

The message from Master Hayashi is as follows:

I hope everyone is keeping well.

Although we are unable to hold performances right now due to COVID-19, I am fortunately in good health, and was recently able to play remotely with some Japanese musicians with whom I am close friends.

Through music performed on our Japanese instruments, we would like to express our strong support for everyone around the world battling COVID-19

So that the day we all can meet again will come as soon as possible, we have chosen a song called "Haru Yo Koi" or "Come, Spring" (hoping happy days will soon return).

We eagerly look forward to the day when we can see all of you again in person and in good health.

HAYASHI Eitetsu
July 1, 2020

There is no singing in this video, but each musician draws out the special characteristics of their respective instrument, resulting in a magnificent ensemble



A special online music session by performers on traditional Japanese instruments

"Haru Yo Koi (May Spring Come)"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vjl4sGLRkQE>

performance. It of course would have been ideal to hear them live, but to arrange the schedules of such celebrated musicians in order for them to play together would have been an enormous challenge at the best of times. A remote performance which does not require transporting instruments may have made it easier for them to adjust their schedules among themselves. This might be yet another example of the "new

normal". Regardless, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to those who produced this wonderful music and took the trouble of delivering it to us.