

Mr. Kazuhiro SEKINE
Journalist of The Asahi Shimbun

<Profile of The Asahi Shimbun>

<http://asahi.com>

Year of Foundation	1879
Chairperson	Shinya IIDA
CEO	Masataka WATANABE
Capital	650 million yen
Consolidated Revenue (4.1.2014 - 3.31.2015)	436 billion yen
Location	Tokyo Headquarters : Tsukiji 5-3-2 Chuoku Tokyo 1048011 Japan
Number of Employees	4,597

https://twitter.com/usausa_sekine

Number of its followers : 7306

**Mr Sekine wrote a very long article on SATOKO and made it available to the public through twitter on February 19, 2016. Below is its English translation.*

[Japan@World 1] Satoko, a New-York-based pianist and composer

Japan@World 1) It has been almost two years since I came to Sapporo from Moscow. For the first time in many years I have been focusing more and more on “domestic” issues. However, I recently had chances to interview foreigners. For example, Niseko. A number of people from Australia or other Asian countries choose to settle there. The other day, when I went to a ski slope in Niseko I found that the vast majority of the visitors are from outside of Japan.

Japan@World 2) In Sapporo you constantly notice that many foreign tourists are visiting the city. In Niseko I felt as if globalism is starting right in the countryside. Maybe similar phenomena are taking place here and there throughout Japan.

Japan@World 3) Propelled by such feelings, I wish to introduce, bit by bit, “foreign countries” in Japan and “Japan” in foreign countries. In other words I want to try to undertake “international broadcasting” while I stay in Japan. From now on, I will

report through this twitter, if not regularly, one after another, on those who I had a chance to talk to. I would call this undertaking “World@Japan” and ”Japan@World”.

Japan@World 4) Today as the first representative of “Japan@World” I would like to introduce Satoko, who is a New-York-based pianist and composer.

Japan@World 5) Satoko is a performer and composer mainly in the area of classical music. Just in case, I would like to clarify on what I mean by classical music. It does not only refer to the old western music, but to the genre deriving from it. Therefore new pieces of classical music are being produced even at the present moment. Satoko is creating new pieces of classical music day after day.

Japan@World 6) Being such an amateur in music, I got truly intrigued, when she said, “Composing music requires lots of mathematical elements.” Satoko explained, “There is a certain set of rules that classical music is expected to abide by, if you want to claim that it is classical music. That is mathematical, too. For example, the word ‘canon’ meant law in Latin.”

Japan@World 7) She continued, “Some musicians, myself included, experience ‘music coming down from high above upon them’. However, if you do not know the ‘rules’ of the classical music, or do not have the knowledge of mathematics, you are unable to present that music to the world as a piece of classical music.”

Japan@World 8) Having listened to such explanations from Satoko, I recalled a book which I was absorbed in reading in my college years. It is “an Eternal Golden Braid GODEL, ESCHER, BACH”.

Japan@World 9) This is a masterpiece by Douglas R. Hofstadter. Godel is a mathematician who discovered incompleteness theorem. Escher is well known by his trompe l’oeil. And Bach is a famous baroque musician. This book has offered a unique perspective to explain the close interrelationship among mathematics, paintings, and music, which are seemingly not related to each other.

Japan@World 10) Be it mathematics, or paintings, or music, the source of ‘beauty’ may be the rules that govern them. According to Satoko, when she composes music, she experiences ‘sound coming down to her’ during a shallow sleep at night.

Japan@World 11) I sometimes hear musicians say similar things. But Satoko emphasized that receiving something coming down to you is one thing, polishing music is another. “It is only when you have knowledge of composition that you can transform the sound into music that is presentable to the world. That is the rules of classical music, and this is mathematical.” said Satoko.

Japan@World 12) Satoko began playing the piano when she was very young. At the age of 20, when she went to see a piano competition, composition began to interest her.

Japan@World 13) “I was moved by the fact that everyone was playing the pieces of one and the same composer. In addition these pieces sounded completely different, depending upon who played them. I was very impressed that the music remains in generations even after the composer is dead. This experience inspired me to pursue to become a composer in order to be influential to others.”

Japan@World 14) Satoko made up her mind and entered the State University of New York, Purchase College, as a piano major. There she encountered a “culture” that is totally different from that of Japan.

Japan@World 15) Satoko recalls, “I was scolded when I did my best to listen to what the teacher taught me. ‘Do not bind yourself by what the teacher tells you.’ Since listening to the instructions of the teacher was never appreciated, I decided to play the way that was right for me. Then I was praised. I realized through this experience that in American uniqueness counts.”

Japan@World 16) Afterwards I entered The Manhattan School of Music. I felt as if I was going through a “thorough medical check up”. -Satoko. They examined very thoroughly whether I had mastered piano technique, and acquired overall music knowledge. Satoko recalled, “I was told, ‘You do not know anything about the music history before the piano came into existence, or medieval music, do you?’”.

Japan@World 17) At the Conservatory while she was learning classical music that is her current main area of work, she interacted with jazz musicians, which turned out to be inspirational to her compositions.

Japan@World 18) For Satoko it was not difficult to receive what comes down to her. However, even if good melodies come to her mind, bringing them to their completion was not an easy task. When she had a hard time moving forward in producing music, she often consulted with jazz musicians. Amazingly, they were able to make arrangements to the piece right away.

Japan@World 19) Satoko told, “Of course, since they did not learn rules of the classical music, their output was not necessarily appreciated as genuinely classical. But in turn they are required to improvise, so they must have learned to a certain degree theories of arrangements. Therefore I sometimes asked for their help to move forward.

Japan@World 20) After she graduated from the Manhattan School of Music, Satoko had very intensive training from professors of American and Russian conservatories.

She was taught harmony and counterpoint in the way established by a famous French music educator Nadia Boulanger.

Japan@World 21) Satoko moved to the United States about three years ago and began to deepen her activities there. I asked her, “Did you not think about fulfilling yourself as a musician in Japan?” She gave me an interesting response:

Japan@World 22) “Japan is a convenient country in many ways, but I felt it was not suited for creative activities. Working long hours is prevailing, and invitations to drinks and parties come one after another. It is truly difficult to reserve time for myself, in which I am fully left alone. From this point of view in the United States working hours end earlier, and shops and restaurants also close earlier. I believe the US makes it possible to create a desirable environment for inspiration and focus.”

Japan@World 23) Right now Satoko is earnestly working on a requiem. She explained to me, “Sounds sometimes fall upon me, and they feel as if they come from a place different from ours, or of a different dimension, namely the other world. That is why I am attracted by requiems.”

Japan@World 24) According to Satoko, a requiem does not necessarily require the composer to use a melody that conveys sorrow. “Passing away could also mean being relieved from sufferings. In order to create such images, I may choose to make the beginning of the music rather bright.”

Japan@World 25) Satoko used to live in the United States as a child, and has spent many years in America. I was curious and asked whether she ever felt insecure or hesitant, when basing her activities away in a foreign country. Satoko made it clear:

Japan@World 26) “It is important for me to live in a place that suits me, whether it is Japan or not. I judged that the United States would provide me with a better environment than Japan, when it comes to composition. When I move, I experience a completely different level of inspiration.”

Japan@World 27) Satoko has touched upon more technical topics, but because I am an amateur in the music, it was difficult for me to digest them all. Too bad that I cannot share everything in an effective way. I intend to listen to various people, well-known or unknown, from the perspectives of “World@Japan” and “Japan@World”.