

## UNESCO Children's Performing Arts Festival in East Asia (CPAF)



Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, and Ms. Komaki Kurihara, with children's performing groups at the 2001 Children's Performing Arts Festival in East Asia in Beijing, China, 21-23 August 2001

### Background

The Northeast Asia countries with their long history of over five thousands years and a rich cultural heritage, particularly traditional expressions, have a lot to contribute to world cultural diversity and development.

Sharing the expression of diversity can be a great source of enrichment for East-Asian societies, drawing from a broad spectrum of world visions and creativity that offer all citizens several possible lifestyles. Performing arts are a form of artistic expression, which is particularly suitable for showing the benefits of diversity in the region.

Furthermore, building peace and mutual understanding in the minds of children, who will be the future leaders, is crucial for long-lasting stability in this region. The incomparably rich cultural heritage of this region is a vital source of inspiration for fostering understanding among the children.

In the summer of 2000, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, paid his first official visit to China. The National Federation of UNESCO Associations in China arranged a children's performance in honour of his visit. He enjoyed the performance so much that he suggested that the National Commissions for UNESCO organise an East Asian Children's Performing Arts Festival (CPAF). The first such festival was held in Beijing in August 2001 which coincided with the first year of the United Nations International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010).

Encouraged by the success of the first CPAF, the Director-General suggested organising the Festival as an annual cultural event for the region with different hosts from the countries of the region. Thus, the second CPAF was successfully organised by the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan in the seaside city of Fukuoka, Japan in August 2002, and the third by the Korean National Commission for UNESCO in Suwon, Korea, in July 2004. It was agreed at the Sub-Regional Meeting of the Secretaries-General of the National Commissions for UNESCO of East Asia in Seoul on 31 July 2004, that the 2005 CPAF is to be held in Macao SAR, China, co-organised by the UNESCO Centre of Macao and the Macao Special Administrative Region Government, from 28 to 30 July 2005.

### **Objectives of the Festival**

The Festival aims to foster the exchange and appreciation of diverse cultural traditions and a way to promote the culture of peace, especially among young people. It seeks to have a positive impact on the ongoing efforts by countries in the East Asia sub-region to promote mutual understanding and encourage peaceful interactions among youth from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

The Festival particularly seeks to:

- share the unique cultural and artistic traditions of China (including Hong Kong SAR and Macao SAR), DPR Korea, Japan, Mongolia, and the Republic of Korea among the children of the participating countries and regions
- promote international friendship and cooperation among children and youth living in the East Asia sub-region
- foster mutual understanding and respect through the exchange and performance of cultural arts by children's performing groups

### **Brief summary of previous CPAFS**

#### **1. The 2001 UNESCO Children's Performing Arts Festival in East Asia in Beijing, China (21-23 August 2001)**

The first CPAF was held in Beijing as a three-day event from 21 to 23 August 2001. The five cluster countries in the East-Asia sub-region were invited to Beijing as participants,

namely China with Macao SAR and Hong Kong SAR, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Japan, Mongolia, and the Republic of Korea (ROK).



Opening Ceremony of the Children's Performing Arts Festival in East Asia in Beijing, China, 21-23 August 2001

The children travelled to Beijing with the aim of demonstrating their talent and skills to friends from other countries and to share their own concepts of the "Culture of Peace". The three-day event was an unforgettable experience for the children. The young performers came to Beijing, an unfamiliar city to them, with great curiosity and made new friends from other countries. The opening ceremony was organised at the Temple of Heaven, one of China's World Heritage sites. In the evening of the

Opening Ceremony, approximately 2,000 young performers gathered together. Besides the performing groups from other countries, almost twenty primary schools and middle schools in Beijing took part in the ceremony. The Director-General himself inaugurated the Festival. Ms. Komaki Kurihara, a renowned Japanese actress and adviser to the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan, was invited as a special guest to the Festival and read a peace poem at the Opening Ceremony to over a thousand children.

Three performances were given, including the Opening and Closing Ceremonies. The main performance was given on the second day at the Children's Palace in the Dongcheng District of Beijing. Children were actively involved in the performance. The overall length of the main performance was over three hours.



Chinese acrobatics

The Closing Ceremony of CPAF was held at the Beijing Huijia Private

School, which provided room and board for the children during the event. The Director-General of UNESCO and the President of the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in China were also present and made closing remarks. One representative from each country or region expressed their gratitude toward UNESCO for having organised this event.



Dancing performance by the D. P. R. Korean children

In addition, around 15 young performers from each delegation also attended the Opening Ceremony of the China Penglai “Commemoration of Peace” International Youth Cultural Festival on 20 August 2002, prior to the Opening of CPAF, representing the UNESCO delegation. The performances given by the children were very much appreciated both by the local organisers and by the China Central TV Directors of the Festival.

During their stay in Beijing, the delegations visited the Palace Museum, the Summer Palace and the Great Wall.

The CPAF gave the young performers in the East Asia region a very good opportunity to carry out exchange activities. During this event, the children from different countries and regions stayed and performed together in harmony despite their linguistic and cultural differences. At the end of the Festival, the young performers and the heads of the six delegations exchanged gifts. Participants from D.P.R. Korea and the Republic of Korea also shook hands and took pictures together to cherish and preserve the memory of this event. It can be said that the event met the goal of promoting mutual understanding and encouraging peaceful interaction among youth from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.



Mongolian dance



Coming together at lunch

## 2. The 2002 UNESCO Children's Performing Arts Festival of East Asia in Fukuoka, Japan (1-3 August 2002)

The second CPAF was held at the Japanese seaside city, Fukuoka, from 1 to 3 August 2002.



Traditional Korean fan dance, Republic of Korea

The Opening Ceremony was attended by Mr. Matsuura and Ms. Komaki Kurihara, who recited her original poem to the participating children. Her poem was translated into Chinese, Korean and Mongolian and handed out to the children in advance. Traditional as well as popular Japanese performances were given by famous actors, performing groups, and local school children.

On the first day, the Director General of UNESCO, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, gave a lecture entitled "Achieving World Peace through Cultural Exchanges". The lecture was publicised through newspapers and magazines and a brochure distributed widely in Fukuoka and amongst UNESCO Associations throughout Japan.



Japanese music performance



D. P. R. Korean dance

Culture of Peace were displayed in the lobby of Fukuoka Civic Hall. Picture panels on the history of

All participating groups from 5 countries and 1 region made performances. 1,500 people from Fukuoka city and its neighbouring cities gathered to enjoy the Festival, which was covered by media all over Japan. Brochures on UNESCO, the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan (NFUAJ) and



Mongolian dance

UNESCO as well as artworks from the “Festival of Asian Children’s Art” were exhibited during the period of the 2002 CPAF.



Ballet performance, Macao SAR

The children took part in cultural exchange programmes, which included visits to local primary and secondary schools. Students at the local schools prepared programmes for the visitors including music and dance performances. Some of the participating groups gave performances in return to express their appreciation to the local children. Lunch was also served at the schools, which provided the opportunity for further

interaction between the participants and local children of their own age. In addition to the school visits, participants also visited the Umino-Nakamichi Seaside Youth House, took part in the Hakata Bay Cruise and the Hakata Primary School Summer Festival, and made excursions to the Marine World, Fukuoka Tower and Fukuoka City Museum.



Chinese folk dance

At the Closing Ceremony, children from each participating country and region read a declaration of peace in their native languages.



Having fun together through our common performing arts

Altogether, 19 students from China, 20 students from Macao SAR, 19 students from DPRK, 21 students from Mongolia, 24 students from the Republic of Korea, and 88 students from Japan participated in the Festival.

The Festival with its diverse performances and cultural exchange programmes provided a golden opportunity for children of the participating countries and region to get together, make friends with each

other by sharing their common background of performing arts, and learn about the relationship as well as the differences between their cultures and histories. Such direct contact and dialogue allowed for the development of mutual understanding and

friendship among the participating children and strengthened their commitment to peace. These values and experiences the participants brought back to their own countries and spread among their peers.

### 3. The 2004 UNESCO Children's Performing Arts Festival of East Asia in Suwon, Korea (29 - 31 July 2004)

The third CPAF was held in Suwon, Korea, from 29 to 31 July 2004.



Singing along with melody from home

children's performing group was invited to the stage and asked to showcase their talents. The atmosphere reached its climax during the finale given by the Nanpa Boys and Girls Choir singing the East Asian Folk Song Medley, including the most popular folk songs from all participating countries and regions. Each performing group stood up, sang along and applauded when the familiar melody from their own country or region sounded.

To welcome the participating children from China, Japan, Mongolia and Korea, and create a festive atmosphere while promoting CPAF in the city, the Korean National Commission for UNESCO and the City of Suwon organised a gala evening for the first night. Both professional and amateur performers gave excellent performances of music, dance and other kinds of performing arts. During Act II, each participating



Chinese folk dance



Hong Kong children's choir

printed and distributed along with the programme brochure among the participants. Ms Sumi JO, a renowned Korean opera singer who was appointed

To celebrate this event, two internationally renowned figures took the floor. First, Ms Komaki Kurihara, recited her original poem "In Search of Peace" in Japanese. Her poem was translated into Chinese, English, Japanese, Korean and Mongolian, and was



Macao children's choir

UNESCO Artist for Peace in April 2003 for her contribution to world peace and intercultural understanding, presented two Songs for Peace. Joined by the Suwon Youth Orchestra and the Sunhwa Arts School's Choir, she sang "Il Bacio" and the "Radetzky March".



Sumi JO

Traditional Korean fan dance, R. of Korea



Ten performing groups from four countries (China, Japan, Mongolia and Republic of Korea) and two special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macao) participated in the Opening Performance and the main performances. More than five thousand



Traditional Morin Khuur music of Mongolia

Japanese folk dance



people from Suwon and other regions in Korea came to watch the performance. The SBN and Arirang TV networks recorded the entire Festival to be broadcast at home and abroad.

After the performances, he participants enjoyed

an outdoor feast as part of the Night for Friendship.

Entertainers dressed as cartoon characters joined the recreation programme, which included a 'Dance Queen Contest', a 'Mr. Beefy Contest', and a 'Long Leg Contest'. At the end of the Night, a campfire was lit, sparking the fire of friendship and understanding in each participant's heart.



Night for Friendship

Students from abroad were divided into five groups according to nationality, and visited five middle schools located in Suwon. The Korean hosts welcomed them with their own performances, and the gatherings were full of joy and laughter. It seemed as if no language barriers existed during this pleasant time. The School Exchange Programme was extended to the Home Stay Programme later that evening.



The Home Stay Programme was specially designed to give the participating foreign students more opportunities to understand Korean culture. It was incorporated with the School Exchange Programme, so that a host family whose child is enrolled in one of the ‘sister schools’ accepted one or two students and provided a home stay for the night. The children learned a great deal about Korean culture and customs, and both Korean and foreign students built friendship through this opportunity. Many students shed tears when departing, and asked to stay for another night with the family.



School exchange programme



Special music class with Sumi JO

Ms. Sumi JO held a special music class for the participants of the Festival. She carefully chose two Korean songs that were easy to follow and understand. Their musical notations were prepared in advance, with lyrics transcribed phonetically into five languages (including English). A brief explanation of the songs was also made. Ms. JO asked the students to sing together and in separate groups, and invited a few to come to the stage for an impromptu ‘international competition’.

At the Closing Ceremony, children from each nation read a paragraph which they had written in their native language to form the 2004 East Asian Children’s Peace Declaration.

At the 2004 CPAF, 20 students from China, 12 from Hong Kong SAR, 35 from Macao SAR, 14 from Japan, 26 from Mongolia, and 198 students from Republic of Korea gathered in Suwon, and enjoyed wonderful experience together during the unforgettable summer days in Korea.

### Major achievements

In the past four years, the CPAF has given young performers in East Asia an unprecedented opportunity to carry out exchanges with face-to-face contact. Children from different countries and regions stayed and performed together in harmony despite the language and culture differences.

For the first time during the CPAF in Beijing (2001), participants from DPR Korea and the Republic of Korea exchanged gifts, shook hands and took pictures together to cherish

and preserve the memory of the event. During the second CPAF in Fukuoka (2002), children from the Korean peninsula performed together on the same stage for the common cause of peace and mutual understanding. Beyond the strong political symbol, such acts of dialogue will have a long lasting impact on the children. This was a fulfillment of UNESCO's role as a peace building UN agency, particularly in the minds of the children for a better future.

The widely used mass media such as television, radio, newspapers and Internet, also allowed dissemination of the activities of the Festival beyond the participants and raised awareness of common cultural heritage shared by cultures of East Asia and the need for dialogue and mutual understanding for a durable peace in the region.

### **Challenges, recommendations and way forward**

In 2003, the outbreak of SARS in China led to the cancellation of the 2003 UNESCO Children's Performing Arts Festival of East Asia, originally planned to take place in Macao SAR, China, 7-10 August 2003.

In 2004, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea informed UNESCO in July of its final decision not to send children to participate in the 2004 UNESCO Children's Performing Arts Festival of East Asia in Suwon, Republic of Korea, 29-31 July 2004, despite UNESCO's repeated efforts through all possible channels to facilitate the participation of the DPRK children in the Festival. The dedicated efforts of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO, and the host city Suwon, as well as the active participation by performing groups from China (including Hong Kong SAR and Macao SAR), Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea made the Festival a success after all. However, the belief remains for all that the participation of all countries in the Northeast Asian sub-region is the guarantee for achieving the expected impact of this important annual Festival.

In addition to such factors as human and natural disasters or political considerations, it has been observed during the past CPAFs that logistic problems such as the communication difficulty between different parties concerned caused by geographical distance may sometimes also hinder the efficient organization of the Festival. Furthermore, the tight time schedule during the Festival proved to be challenging for the participating children. It has been recommended that more consideration be taken to improve the communication modality and the time schedule for the Festival in order to enhance smooth organization and more fruitful outcome of the Festival.

### **Conclusion**

The CPAF aimed at "safeguarding and promoting the rich diversity of cultures", as grounded in UNESCO Constitution and the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted unanimously by the UNESCO General Conference in 2001. The Declaration acknowledges cultural diversity as the common heritage of humanity. It

further promotes a vision of culture as inheritance and “blueprint giving our lives meaning,” while defending a dynamic view, in which culture is seen as a continuous, flexible and evolving process that adapts the received inheritance to new contexts.

In line with those guiding principles, the CPAF has managed to respond to the challenge of moving from celebrating the diversity of national traditions to building pluralism by promoting the principle of “learning to live together.” This principle places citizens of the world on an equal level while respecting differences thereby combating prejudice, mistrust, fear and racism.

This Festival is an exceptional opportunity to give a concrete illustration to the motto so dear to UNESCO: “*Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.*” (Preamble of UNESCO Constitution)