

## **Museo del Violino and Auditorium Giovanni Arvedi Open in Cremona, Italy**

**By Dr. Yasuhisa Toyota**

In the September, 2012 issue of this newsletter we wrote about the completion of the Museo del Violino and Auditorium Giovanni Arvedi in Cremona, Italy, a city known as the world's foremost locale for violin craftsmanship. After the completion of construction, the project entered a six-month period of fine tuning and preparations for a grand opening planned for the spring of 2013. That grand opening became delayed by nearly six months and instead was held on September 14, 2013.

### **Benefits of the Delayed Opening**

The reason for the delayed opening was simply a matter of one government official's schedule. Italian President Giorgio Napolitano was one of the invitees to the grand opening. After the February, 2013 Italian general election, the president's schedule became very busy and his attendance at the event became difficult to schedule. Until the president's attendance could be confirmed for September, the official opening was put on hold.

In retrospect, the opening's delay may have been a blessing in disguise because it meant that the fine tuning and preparations of the new hall proceeded at a more leisurely pace than if the hall had opened on schedule. We used the extended period to have numerous performers and ensembles rehearse in the hall so that they had time to familiarize themselves with the hall's acoustics. The performers and ensembles included violin soloists and soloists of many other instruments as well as string quartets, woodwind ensembles and choruses, among others. I had the pleasure of being present at some of the rehearsals.

### **The Auditorium's Unique Audience Seating Arrangement**

The new hall has a unique layout unlike that of most chamber music halls. Even though this is a small hall with just 450 audience seats, the stage is not at one end of the hall but, instead, is located in the center of the audience with about 1/3 of the seats at the "back" of the stage. This layout resulted from an iterative design in which we prioritized seating the audience as close to the stage as possible. Also, we aimed to enhance the hall's characteristic of intimacy by having members of the audience able to see each other's faces instead of just the backs of their heads.

### **Overview of the Center's Facilities**

With this hall layout, when performers step on the stage for the first time, it is not unusual for them to feel somewhat bewildered by the surrounding audience seating. Specifically, when performers walk onto the stage, they are sometimes not certain which way to face. After a few moments, the performers orient themselves toward the

direction of the greater number of audience seats and begin to play. Still, I've noticed that during some musicians' first rehearsals, body language makes it clear that the musicians are not yet 100% sure they are facing in the correct direction.

The advice I give to performers and ensembles is to think about freeing themselves from the restrictions of standard stage seating layouts. The audience doesn't face the stage from one direction, but from all sides, so for example an ensemble might try sitting in a circle on the stage. (Figures 1 and 2 show an ensemble on stage before and after they tried the circular seating arrangement.) As a result of my suggestion, many of the ensembles that rehearse in the hall express interest in sitting in a circle facing each other. Almost all of them report that they experience increased ability to communicate with each other when seated in the circular arrangement.

One string quartet that expressed interest in the circular seating arrangement and implemented the arrangement during their rehearsals played an encore performance at the auditorium's opening concert. Before they played the encore the ensemble rearranged their chairs in the circular seating arrangement, thereby inaugurating the use of this seating arrangement for performances as well as rehearsals. I think the hall would do well to have this unique seating style become one of the "selling points" of this new chamber music hall.

### September 14, 2013 Opening Events

Before the hall's inaugural concert, Museo del Violino (of which the hall is a part), held its opening ceremonies at the plaza in front of the museum building. President Napolitano was, after all, unable to attend, but the mayor of Cremona, ministers in the Italian cabinet and top officials of the European Union participated (Figure 3).



Figure 1: Woodwind Ensemble Rehearsal Using Normal Seating Layout



Figure 2: Woodwind Ensemble Seated in Circular Layout



Figure 3: Opening Ceremony at Piazza Marconi

By my estimation, about 2,000 people assembled to watch the ceremony and proceedings. I overheard people in the crowd marveling at the large gathering, saying this was the first time they'd seen so many people in one place at one time in their small city.

One after the other, the politicians and other dignitaries addressed the crowd. Many voiced similar messages about how the new museum and hall would bring people to the city and contribute to the economic health of Cremona. From my experience, effective and skillful operations are an essential ingredient for attracting visitors and patrons to a cultural destination. Without effective planning and strategies that attract people, economic benefits cannot be realized. I would have been eager to hear some discussion and foresight about a vision for the museum and hall's success. Hopefully, people with the authority to put such a vision in place will make it happen.