

## re: music

## Pianist Kawai seeks out the real Chopin

Chiho Iuchi  
STAFF WRITER

“I had the sense I was on a mission when I decided to do this project,” recounts Poland-based Japanese pianist Yuko Kawai, who has been introducing authentic versions of the works of Chopin (1810-49) — as restored in scores published as the National Edition — through her Chopinissimo recital series since 2001. “But since it started, it has given me a lot of pleasure.”

The National Edition of Frederic Chopin is a series of scores that the Polish government approved in 1959 of works by the artist widely regarded as the country’s greatest Romantic composer and virtuoso pianist. His music is among the most performed on stages around the world, and the most often published as sheet music as well.

Unfortunately, though, there are many textual differences among more than 100 editions that have been issued in the past 140 years, and it has become difficult to know which are truest to the master’s originals.

The aim of the National Edition is to present the whole of Chopin’s musical output, free from editorial additions and based on the most authentic sources, as close to the composer’s hand-written manuscripts as possible. The National Edition has been officially endorsed by organizers of the International Chopin Piano Competition since 2005, and is due to be completed in 2010.

Polish pianist Jan Ekier (b. 1913), a prize-winner at the third International Frederic Chopin Piano Competition in 1937, and the head of the juries of the competition from 1985 to 2000, has devoted himself to working for the National



Edition for 50 years, since he was appointed its editor in chief at the age of 45 in 1959. This veteran pianist and professor was the very person who spotted the talent of a young Japanese girl and changed her life.

Born in Okazaki, Aichi Prefecture, Yuko Kawai had her first piano lesson at the age of 5. The precocious little girl would play records by herself, picking through her father’s collection, and would listen to Chopin’s music over and over again.

“Chopin has fascinated me since my childhood,” she says. “His music is so graceful. A noble music. I can hardly explain in words, but I just feel it.”

In 1990, while studying piano at Aichi Prefectural University of Arts, Kawai got a chance to take a lesson from Ekier when he was on a visit to Japan. This encounter paved the way to Poland for Kawai, who had stayed in her hometown until then and never thought of studying abroad. From 1991 to 1994, Kawai studied at the National Chopin Music Academy in Warsaw under the tutelage of Ekier.

“Those were such happy days,” recalls Kawai. “I felt so at home in Poland. Professor Ekier’s excellent method retrained me from the very starting point. For example, he taught me how to sit at the piano. And my weak fingers, which made me almost give up on being a professional, were surprisingly strengthened.”

In 1995, Kawai participated in the 13th Chopin International Piano Competition in Warsaw. Even though she did not win a prize, her soulful performances impressed the jury members as well as the media, leading to an article by the renowned Polish critic Janusz Ekiert and a special feature broadcast by Polish state radio. Kawai played a 14-concert tour around Poland in February and March 1996, and has been active ever since, giving performances in Poland, Japan and many other countries.

She was the first Asian artist to play on a recording of the National Edition disc series by Polish label BeArTon, releasing her first album, “Lento . . . and Other Works” in 1999.

She also gave the world premiere of Chopin’s piano concertos in E minor and F minor for one piano as published in the National Edition.

“It was not rare that concertos were performed by a single pianist in Chopin’s day, because a full orchestra or a large concert hall was not always available.”

**Key renditions: Poland-based pianist Yuko Kawai presents versions of the works of Chopin based on scores that are believed to be the most authentic ever.**

explains Kawai.

These two famous concertos were composed around 1830 in Chopin’s youth, before he left his home country. Looking at the original handwritten score of the Concerto in F minor, it is apparent that the handwriting for the orchestra parts is different from that for the solo piano part written by Chopin himself. Recent research suggests that some experienced elder possibly helped the young composer in the orchestration, and the later editions made the orchestra sound even thicker. According to Kawai, the original concertos were written by Chopin himself as solo piano versions.

“Of course, these pieces were meant to be concertos, but, in a sense, we can rediscover the real sound that Chopin intended by listening to these solo piano versions,” she says. “And in the National Edition, the comments of the composer are noted. For example, this part should be played by flute and that part by strings. I try to vary the piano tone like the instruments of the orchestra.”

Following the Tokyo premiere of the Piano Concerto No. 2 in F minor for one piano at her last recital at the Hamarikyu Asahi Hall in June 2008, the Piano



Concerto No. 1 in E minor, also for one piano and written by Chopin, will be featured at Kawai’s upcoming recital at the same hall.

“Some say that I am like a missionary of the National Edition,” laughs Kawai. “But I think that you should say ‘No’ to the wrong information that goes around, and if you know the right thing, you should inform people of it.”

Modest and quiet, yet earnest and determined, Kawai has touched the hearts of audiences through her Chopinissimo series of concerts.

“The title of this long project, Chopinissimo, is of my coinage,” she says with a smile. “I want to get to the essence of Chopin’s tunes, as close as possible to every single piece. Performing the entire body of Chopin’s work in the National Edition is not the purpose but the result.”

“Now I am convinced that I was born to perform Chopin’s music. No doubt.”

*Yuko Kawai Piano Recital (part of the Chopinissimo series) takes place at Hamarikyu Asahi Hall in Tsukiji, Tokyo on Jan. 24 at 2 p.m. Tickets are ¥3,000-¥5,000. For more information, call (03)3235-3777.*

## Next week

Insane Japanese bands Heisei Josei and Hadashi no Terrorist speak to Simon Bartz

## Fall Out Boy turn their focus outward toward a more worldly folly

AP

If you’re wondering how Pete Wentz feels about becoming a dad or looking for insight into his recent marriage to Ashlee Simpson, don’t expect to find any details by listening to Fall Out Boy’s new CD, “Folie a Deux.”

Even though the bassist is the chief lyricist and the band’s tabloid-centric spokesman, for “Folie a Deux,” Wentz shifted the focus away from himself and turned it outward to the world.

Lead singer Patrick Stump calls “Folie a Deux” the band’s “statement record.”

“(It’s) dissecting how self-motivated our culture is,” Stump said in a recent interview. “Pete on this record wrote from a very different perspective than he did on previous records.”

“Folie a Deux,” French for “shared

madness of two,” was released last month. It’s the third major-label CD for the emo-rockers, who became a multiplatinum success story with the release of their 2005 album “From Under the Cork Tree,” which included the top single “Sugar, We’re Goin Down.”

While Stump’s melodious falsetto anchors the band’s sound, it’s Wentz who provides Fall Out Boy’s emotional content (the group’s other members are guitarist Joe Trohman and drummer Andy Hurley). In the past, Wentz has worn his heart on the band’s lyrical sleeve, with songs about relationship dramas and painful splits.

Over the past two years, Wentz has become a sought-after star thanks to his high-profile union with Simpson, their new baby (Bronx Mowgli), his turn as TV host on MTV’s “FNMTV” and his endless

blog postings (Stump has had successful collaborations with the likes of bands such as Gym Class Heroes — on Wentz’s record label — but has preferred to stay out of the limelight).

But as Wentz reaches a new high in name recognition, musically, he decided to stop writing as much from a personal standpoint.

“This record is not the standard autobiographical thing like when we first started,” says Stump, sitting with his band mates as they prepare to tape a concert special for U.S. music channel Fuse TV. “Autobiography loses its luster when everyone is doing it.”

“Sometimes I’ve gone into a big, dark cave, and that’s no fun,” adds Wentz, looking a bit fatigued.

“Folie a Deux” is the group’s second album in two years. While the band have

become used to topping the charts, they insist their main goal is simply creating good music.

But at the same time, they don’t want to over-think it.

“A lot of bands sit on their hands and think, ‘We need to make the perfect record,’” Wentz says. “(You should be) taking a snapshot of the moment you’re (in) at the time.”

The band purposely cut short the amount of time set aside for recording the album. Stump said that that was going back to the days when they were a young, broke band who had to finish an album before the money ran out.

“There was something really interesting about that creative process

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## Listening post

LIVE



Glasvegas

The name is cute: a mash-up of Glasgow, the band’s hometown, and Las Vegas, the American Oz. In the great tradition of British bands appropriating U.S. cultural touchstones, Glasvegas take these twin geographic signifiers and turn them into a whole different country that nevertheless feels familiar to anyone with knowledge of old Hollywood movies and the pre-Beatles Top 40. Rumor has it that Lisa Marie Presley was so taken with the Scottish quartet’s guitar-based “wall of sound” that she asked them to record with her. Such a story lends Glasvegas a retro cachet that may confuse the issue. Which Elvis comes to mind: the lean, leather-bedecked rocker or the sequined, fat Vegas fixture?

The music actually owes more to the Goffin-King, Mann-Weill school of postdoowop urban teen pop than it does to the King’s R&B or country-gospel stylings. Such an approach is perfect for the melodramatic stories that guitarist James Allan writes and sings — fathers skipping out on families, husbands guilt-stricken over infidelities. And while his full-on Scottish accent places them firmly in Glasgow, they make just as much sense in Vegas, which is probably why the group has earned so much incredible cross-border love over the past year.

Over-hyped by the usual suspects in the U.K., Glasvegas have already been nominated for top music awards in Sweden and sold out most of the dates on their recent American tour, even though their eponymous debut album came out in the U.S. only this week. It’s been out here since November, and tickets for their two Japan shows are still available, but probably not for long. They’re suckers for anthemic, melodramatic pop in Tokyo and Osaka, too.

*Glasvegas play on Jan. 20 at Ebisu Liquid Room, Tokyo (7 p.m.; [03] 3444-6751); and Jan. 21 at Big Cat, Osaka (8 p.m.; [06] 6535-5569). Each show is ¥5,500 in advance.*

## RECORDED

**LAZYgunsBRISKY — “Catching!” (Babe Star) Jonny — “Cake Album” (One By One)**

Typical. You wait an apparently interminable period for a decent new grrrrl-punk band (it’s been at least three months!) and then two turn up at once.

Tokyo band LAZYgunsBRISKY color their Stony rock riffage with a grungy element that sometimes recalls Hole or PJ Harvey. By and large, though, their new minialbum (which follows 2008’s debut album “Quixotic”) features power-chords and playful, harmony-laden vocals over solid rhythm, with a touch of bad-girl angst thrown in for good measure.

The CD booklet includes such ingenious lyrics as “AiyaiyaiY AILIEY Aiai . . . Mm . . . Mm . . .” and photos of the girls blowing gum bubbles and pulling hammy poses in some squalid squat — it’s unlikely they’re as stinky as the pictures suggest but, well, one can always hope.

Hailing from Aichi Prefecture, Jonny are a more straightforward (and ultimately more fun) proposition. They might mangle their English a little more than Brisky, but they play their rock ‘n’ roll kicks simple and loud. “Birthday” is all breathless gobbliness, while “Bad Girl, Good Life” plays the dynamics game, teasing the listener with quieter sections that erupt in short bursts of joyful abandon.

The only boring track is “Home,” where Jonny succumb to Japan’s insidious love for a ballad, pumping out a bloated mess of guitars and melodies that singer Mio Sato’s voice just isn’t up to. Still, this debut release shows a bucketload of promise for a bright and bratty future. (Daniel Robson)

**Keyshia Cole — “A Different Me” (Universal International)**

Keyshia Cole is 27 years old, a grizzled vet by modern R&B standards, and yet she’s just now discovering her “sexier side” — a part of her personality she politely asks to introduce on the intro track that begins her third album.

A real diva, of course, doesn’t need permission, which is one reason Cole has yet to join the hallowed ranks of Beyoncé, Christina and all of the other singers who have outgrown the need for last names. Still, Cole gets points for agreeability, something “A Different Me” has in spades.

Although the disc also has its share of filler, gems such as “Please Don’t Stop,” a mix of future-sexy funk and “Pleasure Principle”-era Janet Jackson, suggest that Cole could establish herself as something more than an above-average genre singer.

She also deserves credit for “Oh-Oh Yeah-Yeah” and “Playa Cardz Right,” tunes on which she inspires pro-monogamy raps from Nas and 2Pac, respectively. (Granted, Pac died when Cole was 15, so it’s doubtful he had the singer in mind when he recorded his verse.) On “This is Us,” Cole scrubs off the nightclub makeup from the previous track, the ladies’ anthem “Thought You Should Know,” and sings her man a sweet, unadorned love song. The acoustic guitar and Wilson Phillips-like chorus again underscore the idea that Cole, while a gifted performer and songwriter, is more reliable craftsman than superstar force of nature. (Kenneth Partridge, The Hartford Courant)