

Organ and Missions in Japan, Taiwan, and Indonesia

by Roger W. Lowther

In the March 2010 issue of *The American Organist*, I wrote about some of the ways the organ is introducing people to the church and starting dialogues about faith. It delights me to see the organ bringing communities together in the arena of church and connecting them to the beauty and hope of the gospel. In November, we experienced yet another refreshing example of the creative power of music in gifted hands.

In November, the internationally acclaimed duo Chelsea Chen (organ) and Lewis Wong (violin) came to Japan for a week of concerts to help with the church planting effort here. For Thanksgiving, we invited a few families to our home to experience a homemade Thanksgiving meal, followed by a mini-concert by Chelsea and Lewis on a Hauptwerk digital organ. They did a great job, and the evening was a huge success. A man asked if he could come to worship with us the following Sunday. One family asked if they could come this Christmas. Neither are Christians, yet organ music sparked their interest in the church.

Concerts are always about the music, but in church planting, they are also about connecting people and building community. After Thanksgiving, Chelsea, Lewis, and the organ hit the road in Japan giving concerts on Friday for Chiba Chuo Church in 220-seat Harmony Plaza, Saturday for Kaihin Makuhari Grace Church, and Sunday for Ichihara Megumi no Mori Church.

Before Sunday's concert, I sat down next to a young family who had never come to a worship service anywhere before that day. What was the draw? The organ concert! They were invited by a missionary who meets weekly with the wife to practice English and study the Bible. During the concert's intermission, they said they were having a great time and thanked me profusely for inviting Chelsea and Lewis to come to Japan.

Chelsea Chen is not new to musical missions. In fact, she spent a year in Taiwan concertizing throughout the country. (You can read more about her time there in an article entitled "My Fulbright Year in Taiwan" in the February 2009 TAO). She comments, "Churches in Asia often hold concerts for evangelical reasons, because classical music is such a big draw." Hearing the organ in Taiwan where there are so few churches and so few organs has incredible impact on the listeners.

The organ is good for bringing people into the church and also for Christian growth. Chelsea noted, "Once Taiwanese people do become Christians, they don't know anything about church history or hymnody. The organ can connect new Christians with the greater church community both past and present." Bread of Life Church in Taipei, where Chelsea performed a Good Friday concert in 2007, also has a radio station called *Good News Radio*. When they interviewed her,

they played some of her organ music over the radio further exposing the listening audience to the church.

Also in Taipei, Grace Baptist Church holds a Nativity Concert every Christmas showcasing the organ with choir and soloists. The purpose of the concerts is to bring people into the church for the first time to learn about and enjoy the meaning of Christmas. “The organ always plays a major part,” remarked Chelsea.

As a duo, Chelsea Chen and Lewis Wong (violinorgan.com) have concertized in churches all over the world. The Reformed Evangelical Church in Jakarta, Indonesia, pastored by Rev. Stephen Tong, built a large concert hall and organ primarily in order to connect the community to the church. Solely from within the congregation, money was raised to build the largest modern concert hall in all of Indonesia, with a three-manual Casavant organ installed just this year. Home to the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia is a place where churches and organs are very rare indeed! The organ is a huge draw to the surrounding communities and continues to bring people into the church through their concert series.

Music is vital to missions and the organ seems to be playing a rapidly-growing role in that scene. Other stories abound of the organ assisting in spiritual birth and growth in people around the world. If you have some of these stories, please share them with me at rogerlowther@gmail.com.

(Roger Lowther serves as the Artist in Residence with Grace City Church Tokyo in Japan. He received his Master of Music in Organ Performance from The Juilliard School, where he studied with Dr. John Weaver. He lives with his wife Abi and three small boys in downtown Tokyo. You can read more about the work in Japan at missionart.org or rogerlowther.blogspot.com)