

ART & CULTURE



Takako Nishizaki plays the *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto* with the China Philharmonic Orchestra, a fitting honor for the first non-Chinese musician to popularize the classic in the West.



ON A SOUR NOTE

Local legend Takako Nishizaki tells **Bonnie Chen** of her surprise at being left out in the cold over West Kowloon

YOU'D THINK the people shaping the West Kowloon cultural district would be beating a path to her door.

After all, internationally-renowned Hong Kong-based violinist Takako Nishizaki has spent six decades in the rarefied atmosphere of concert halls around the globe and performed alongside some of the world's biggest classical stars.

Not only that, together with her husband, she has built a classical music record label known around the world.

But no, nothing, not even an e-mail. "My husband and I – and even our friends – are surprised that we haven't been consulted on the arts hub.

Perhaps they are too proud to ask and they believe in outsiders," said Nishizaki, who was awarded the Bronze Bauhinia Star in 2003 for her services to music.

Best known for her performances of the *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto*, Nishizaki began performing at the age of five.

Before she was 10, she had already played for greats such as Isaac Stern and Malcolm Sargent.

Nishizaki has also performed in chamber music ensembles with Itzhak Perlman and Pinchas Zukerman, among others, and released over 100 CDs.

She settled in Hong Kong in 1974 after marrying Naxos record label founder-owner Klaus Heymann.

Heymann, a German who has lived in Hong Kong for 42 years, and Naxos are based here.

Founded in 1987, it is one of the world's largest classical music record labels. Naxos music libraries can be found in many music schools and libraries worldwide, including the Central Library.

"Many musicians around the world send us their work, hoping we can make and distribute CDs for them. I listen and make the selections while my husband deals with the business [side of the music]," says Nishizaki.

Having performed at several Hong Kong venues, she joins the chorus of criticism over the acoustics at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre.

"We know what the musicians and orchestras want in a concert hall and what materials should be used.

"If they [the authorities] ask us we can offer advice," she said.

Her friends have found it astonishing the high-profile musical couple have not been consulted.

"They asked me if another Cultural Centre without windows was to be built on the most expensive land in West Kowloon," she adds.

Nishizaki also believes the cultural district project is about education, which she has been active in for years – teaching in her own studios.

A musician needs skill, but also temperament and manner, she said.

Nishizaki advises her students and sometimes even their parents on how they should behave.

"I can tell the personality of a student by just listening to three scales they play. They can't lie, music can tell."

As an example, she cites mainland musicians' interpretation of the *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto*.

"Many of them only emphasize technique and rush a lot when playing. Perhaps it has to do with the culture,

since they have undergone the Cultural Revolution which had to do with class struggle. But *Butterfly Lovers* should be romantic," she said.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the *Butterfly Lovers Violin Concerto*, composed by Chen Gang and He Zhanhao, Nishizaki will perform the piece on November 30 at City Hall.

In May, she performed *Butterfly Lovers* in concert with the China Philharmonic Orchestra at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing to celebrate the 50 years since the classic was composed.

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Nishizaki gets a rousing reception in the Great Hall of the People but it is also a labor of love conveying her passion for the violin to the young.

