

My Japanese Song: Edith Weutonga Speaks of her Candid Experience with Japanese Music Volunteers



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I arrived at my all-girls high school in 1992. Townsend High School was a pool of colour with students from all backgrounds and countries in the region. All the classes were exciting, but my favourite class and moments were spent in the music class with Ms. Hasegawa. Ms. Hasegawa was brought to Zimbabwe through the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) Program which has seen over 500 JOCVs deployed to Zimbabwe. The music centre moulded my vocal abilities and piqued my interest in languages as Miss Hasegawa would teach the girls some world classics and folk songs from Japan...

Haha nalu Daichi no futokolo ni

Walela hito no ko no yolokobi wa alu

Daichi o aiseyo.....

Every winter, all schools around the city of Bulawayo in the Southern suburbs would converge at the Bulawayo theatre and perform at the “The Combined Choirs School Concert”. These were well prepared for with combined rehearsals for Milton High, Townsend High, Founders, Evelyn Girls High and Girls College. I remember how we would all meet, either at Founders or Milton High, to rehearse and perfect the songs, the excited chatter of being around boys (and boys around girls), the teasing, but above all, the making of the most beautiful melodies of young raw voices excited to be the centre of attention through song.

Our teachers were all Japanese, and I would later find out they were volunteers from Japan who committed their time to teach us varying musical instruments, singing and the art of being in a combined choir. At the last concert, we performed a medley of The Beatles and sung Ave Maria. What a beautiful evening we had!

Looking back, I realise that my musical love, knowledge and hunger was well ignited at high school as I was given an opportunity to see what I could be and where music could take me. It’s been 29 years since I left high school and wish I could bring back those days for my children. To be able to sing classics like Yesterday, El Condo Pasa, My Grandfathers Clock, just to kick start their music appreciation, be one with their peers listening to each other’s voices and then standing before audiences to share their new learned cultures. Bring back my Japanese song...

It is noteworthy to note that the JOCV program that helped mould my music career is still ongoing, and schools can contact JICA for more information, and who knows maybe more musical gems can be unearthed!

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