

Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0 – Volume 19

~ The 6th Year of Reiwa (2024) Emperor's Birthday Reception ~

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On Wednesday 28 February, a reception was held at my official residence to celebrate the Emperor's Birthday.

Last year, the weather was drizzling on and off, and I was anxious up until the very start of the event, but this year, in a complete change, we were blessed with good weather. It was a beautiful day, perfect for a reception, under blue skies against the backdrop of Sydney Harbour.

It was my second national day reception as head of mission, but experienced consulate staff prepared for the event and carried out the set-up on the day before the reception without a hitch. Once again, Chef Kodera, the residence's executive chef, gave his all to preparations for the food, as he always does.

The formal proceedings began solemnly with the Japanese and Australian national anthems performed by the Sydney Japanese Chamber Orchestra, a group of promising, talented young musicians conducted by Dr Sadaharu Muramatsu. Dr Muramatsu is also the artistic director of the Strathfield Symphony Orchestra, and for the second consecutive year, he appeared specially at this reception. I was happy to see that several Councillors and the General Manager (GM) from Strathfield City Council were among the attendees.

After my welcome remarks, Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley, Governor of NSW, followed by the Hon. Anoulack Chanthivong, Minister for Trade and Industry, representing the NSW Premier, both gave speeches. Governor Beazley's remarks revealed her deep knowledge of Japan and included mention of a Japanese athlete active in wheelchair marathons and the Cowra Breakout which marks the 80th anniversary this year.

Ministers and members of the NSW Parliament kindly attended the event, including President of the Legislative Council Ben Franklin, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Greg Piper, the leader of the opposition and members of the ruling and opposition parties. RBA Governor Michele Bullock was also among the attendees, as well as the Deputy Lord Mayor of Sydney, and many representatives from the Japanese and Australian business communities, from arts and culture, sports and sister-city exchange, and members of the consular corps.



Part of this year's proceedings was the conferment of the Imperial Decoration for the Honourable Jonathan O'Dea, former Speaker of the NSW Legislative Assembly. Mr O'Dea knows Japan well having studied there as a former participant in the Mitsui Educational Foundation's exchange project. However, in addition to this, during his time as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, he contributed significantly to the promotion of regional exchange and friendship, including between Japan and Australia, as Chair of the NSW Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Friendship Group. It was an honour and a great pleasure for me to present the Imperial Decoration medal and certificate from His Majesty the Emperor to Mr O'Dea in front of his family, including his parents and four sons.



Following on from last year, we again received the kind support of many Japanese businesses. Introducing them in alphabetical order, there was ANA (All Nippon Airways), FujiFilm, JAL (Japan Airlines), JTB, Lion (Kirin Beer), Sapporo Beer, Nippon Food Supplies (Takarashuzo Group), Toyota (display of Mirai hydrogen car), and supplying food items, Kikkoman (the soy sauce for sushi), NH Foods (Omugi Gyu Angus for the roast beef), and LeTao cheesecake – I thank them all for their contributions. In addition, two sake breweries came especially from Japan – Akita Meijo (Yuzawa City, Akita Prefecture) and Kawatsuru Sake Brewery (Kanonji City, Kagawa Prefecture) – all through the event, I noticed people crowded together in that corner to taste the local sakes the breweries were showcasing.

Other sake being served on this occasion were part of the Government of Japan's efforts to support areas affected by disasters – in addition to sake produced in Fukushima Prefecture, we

also served sake from Ishikawa and Toyama Prefectures which were affected by the Noto Peninsula Earthquake at the start of this year. One guest said to me that it was moving to see Junmai Daiginjo sake being served from the Sogen Sake Brewery which is located at the tip of the Noto Peninsula in Suzu City and had been damaged in the disaster.

The ikebana flower arrangement by Mrs Hiroko Prado, President of Ikebana International Sydney Chapter, which graced the receiving line at the entrance was spectacular, and the shape of the bonsai by Mrs Megumi Bennet was also beautiful. The Japanese governmental organisations, JETRO, CLAIR and JNTO, also contributed booths on the evening, and I think we achieved an “All Japan” promotion.

Chef Kodera, executive chef at my official residence, prepared the evening's food, focussing on Japanese traditional cuisine (WASHOKU), which is his speciality. The first round of canapés comprised kombu-cured salmon, simmered daikon radish and marinated fried Sydney Rock oyster; the second round was prawn tempura, mini yakitori, barley-fed Angus roast beef (NH Foods) and fruit salad. All were very well received and I was told that each item prepared for more than 200 people was “sold out” in no time at all. Seeing what Chef Kodera presents with his outstanding skill and attention to detail, I can only sigh out of a sense of deep respect and gratitude to have the opportunity to work with him here in Sydney.



This year's reception was much larger than last year's with some 200 attendees, and the event ran smoothly without incident as people enjoyed themselves. I was so happy and relieved.

On the day, not many people stayed inside the residence. Instead, crowds of people milled around outside and conversations flowed. Seeing that, I thought to myself over and over, “Aussies really do like the outdoors. I'm so glad the weather's good today.”

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to everyone involved, including the companies which contributed to the event and Dr Muramatsu who conducted the anthems, and of course our wonderful guests who attended, for making the reception such a success.

(Ends)