

Letters and Essays from Sydney 2.0 – Volume 9

~ Emperor's Birthday Reception~

25 February

(Translation published 6 March)

On 22 February, the Emperor's Birthday Reception was held at my official residence.

For me, it was the first time to host a national day reception as the head of mission and I felt so honoured by the occasion.

I had hoped to hold the reception on the 23rd, the actual birthday of His Majesty the Emperor. However, due to a major NSW Government event being held on the same day, it was decided to hold the reception the day before His Majesty's Birthday to minimise the impact on guests' availability.

The function space was perfectly set up and managed by experienced consulate staff. I will return to this topic later, but the food was wonderfully prepared by the residence chef, Mr Kodera Hirofumi.

I had only one wish... "Please don't rain!"

This year with COVID restrictions lifted, some 160 guests attended; that was more than double last year's event.

With so many guests attending, being able to use the outdoor space or not has an enormous impact on the overall space available for guests to mingle. I heard that last year it poured with rain!

The evening before the day of the reception, there was a thunderstorm and heavy rain. I prayed to the weather gods for no stormy weather.

The day arrived and the weather was cloudy. Just before the event, there were spots of rain. The national anthems were to be performed by an ensemble conducted by Dr Sadaharu Muramatsu. Stringed instruments must be kept out of the rain, and their rehearsal was conducted indoors.

About one hour before doors opened, it must have been around 5pm, we confirmed that the dark clouds had passed and that we would be able to use the outside space. We set the podium for the speeches and chairs for the musicians outdoors.

From then on, the event proceeded as planned by consulate staff.

Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of NSW, delivered the main speech as the guest of honour. We were also honoured to have the attendance of state dignitaries including Chief Justice Andrew Bell, Speaker of the NSW Legislative Assembly Jonathan O'Dea and Minister for Multiculturalism Mark Coure. Those gathered that evening were from various fields - business, culture, the arts, sports and so on – all supporting friendship, exchange and cooperation between Japan and Australia.

The Governor's speech was wonderful, conveying a deep understanding of and friendship for Japan. She introduced a *waka* poem by His Majesty the Emperor at a New Year's poetry reading during the COVID pandemic, and she then presented her own *waka* poem on Japan-NSW friendship. The Governor also mentioned the performance of Japanese athletes during this year's Australia Day wheelchair race and also touched on the contribution of Japanese architects at the Art Gallery of NSW (as I introduced in the previous edition). I am so grateful for her speech, redolent of her profound knowledge of Japan and her friendship.

I was moved by the excellent performance of the national anthems. This time they were performed by the Sydney Japanese Chamber Orchestra, comprising talented young musicians conducted by Dr Sadaharu Muramatsu, the artistic director of Strathfield Symphony Orchestra.

A number of Japanese companies also supported the event. Introducing them in alphabetical order, the following companies had booths: Fuji Film (instant snaps captured guests at the reception), Grow Green Tea Company (matcha ice cream etc.), NIHONSAKARI (staff came from Japan to introduce Japanese sake), and Toyota Motor Corporation Australia (mainly introduced their hydrogen developments such as the Mirai hydrogen fuel cell car. The Governor and Mr Wilson were particularly interested in this.). Orion Breweries, Lion (Kirin) and Frucor Suntory kindly provided drinks. There was a spectacular ikebana floral arrangement by Ikebana International Sydney Chapter located near the receiving line. The bonsai by Mrs Megumi Bennett also lent a dignified air. The Japanese government organisations JETRO, CLAIR and JNTO all had booths. It was an "All Japan" effort to show the appeal of Japan.

And of course there was the fantastic food prepared by Chef Koderu Hirofumi, who is the official residence chef. The canapés included everything from Japanese *washoku* through to modern Australian items. As I briefly mentioned on the night, Chef Koderu graduated from university having specialised in linguistics (English). Before coming to Sydney, he worked at a famous Japanese restaurant in Tokyo. Seeing him flex his culinary muscles here in Sydney, I realised how fortunate I am that our paths have crossed.

I would like to give a heartfelt thank-you to everyone who participated.

Finally, (sorry to labour the point) let me I say one more time - it was so good that the rain held off until the end of the event...

That night, I was able to sleep really well!

< Photos of the event can be found on our website and SNS.>

https://www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/about_consul_generals_gallery.html#EBR2023

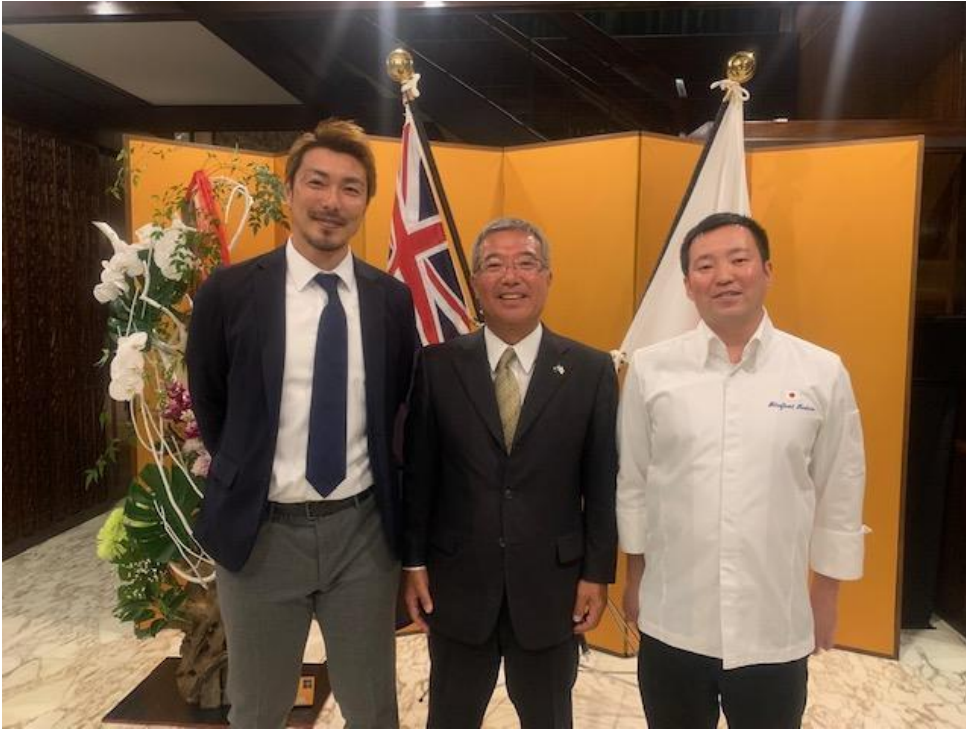
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<Below are a few of the canapés that Chef Koderu carefully prepared.>

Pâté de porc with pickles

Tricolored marinated snapper

Summer vegetable frittata with semi-dried tomatoes

Bagna càuda (vegetables with anchovy dip)

Gorgonzola caesar salad on endive

