

### **Ten Years after the Tsunami, Fukushima Students Send Out Positive COVID-19 Message**

On 11 March 2011, an earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident devastated the Fukushima area of north-eastern Japan. Ten years later, a group of young musicians, the Fukushima Youth Sinfonietta, is spreading the message that disasters and pandemics can be overcome and communities built back stronger. They know – they have done it. Their message is particularly targeted at the UK, as London has played a key role in helping the group become what it is today: a thriving youth orchestra, which has played in international venues, including twice (in 2014 and 2019) at London’s Queen Elizabeth Hall.

“I remember going to sleep with a helmet on,” says one member of the orchestra, now a university student, who was 10 years old at the time of the tsunami. “Only music gave me the courage and strength to continue when I had to leave my home town and change schools because of the radiation,” says another member, who has been to London twice with the orchestra, and had to live briefly in an evacuation centre with his family following the 2011 disaster.

Now, to commemorate the ten year anniversary, the orchestra is making a video showing how individual members and the whole community have benefitted from coming together and making music in the wake of the tsunami. “Just as we recovered from the earthquake, we want people to know that the world can escape from Covid-19 and go forward strongly” says the director of the video.

At the same time, the orchestra wants to show their gratitude to the many people who have helped them along the way. This includes Panos Karan, the founder of the UK charity Keys of Change and now the artistic director of the orchestra, the many companies, trusts and individuals who have supported the FYS, and the hundreds of people who attended the concerts at London’s South Bank and showed their appreciation so enthusiastically.

The documentary will be available on 8 March 2021, on the FYS and Keys of Change websites, [www.fukushimamusic.org](http://www.fukushimamusic.org), [www.keysofchange.org](http://www.keysofchange.org), as well as on corresponding social media.

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### **Background**

The [Fukushima Youth Sinfonietta](http://www.fukushimamusic.org) (FYS) is one of the most positive things to emerge from the devastation of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in northern Japan. Set up by UK charity Keys of Change in partnership with schools in Fukushima, initially to bring hope to the young people in the area, the orchestra has made rapid musical strides and has already performed

in the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London (2014, 2019), Tokyo Opera City (2015), Boston Symphony Hall (2016), Bangkok Siam Pic Ganesha Theatre (2017) and Tokyo Suntory Hall (2018).

The FYS is a dynamic group of around fifty young Japanese musicians who have been coached by Keys of Change musicians over the past eight years, as well as by professional musicians from the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra and gifted young musicians from the prestigious Toho Gakuen Music University in Tokyo. Wherever it has performed, from Fukushima itself to London and Boston, the orchestra has enjoyed an extremely enthusiastic reception. We have repeatedly seen how the determination of the young people to create something truly excellent in the face of all kinds of adversity, coupled with their high and continually improving standard, has the power to inspire other young people and adults.

[Keys of Change](#) is a UK charity formed by individuals who deeply believe that playing music can make this world a better place. Keys of Change aims to advance the lives of children and young people around the world through musical education and access to live classical music performances. The charity was set up in early 2011 by the international concert pianist [Panos Karan](#), who works with three other trustees, all involved in music and/or education, and a growing number of committed volunteers in many countries.

Over the past years, Keys of Change has brought music education and set youth orchestras in remote areas of the Amazon basin, Ecuador Uganda, Mexico, Sierra Leone, India, Ghana and the tsunami-ravaged Fukushima area in Japan, as well as in Greece, Russia and London.



Photo by: Fumiko Tanaka