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## Nagano's Songs

Three years ago the world-renowned conductor Kent Nagano heard traditional Japanese children's songs for the first time. His daughter Karin Kei had been six years old on the day she inspired her father to one of his most ambitious projects. One morning at the breakfast table, she surprised her parents when she sang some of the pieces she had learned in her Parisian kindergarten. The 58-year-old Californian Nagano was so touched by the lyrics and sounds of the songs that he immediately started researching their source.

In Japan, the songs that enchanted Nagano are commonly known as "Shoka", or school hymns. They are based on the lyrics of famous Japanese poets and are geared to Western musical styles. The songs emerged during the era of the Meiji-Restorations in the outgoing 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was the time when Japan finally opened itself to the West after close to 250 years of reclusiveness. It was in this period of economic and cultural upheaval that the children's "Shoka" came into being. Sometimes the lyrics deal with day to day life, while other songs tell of the strangers coming ashore in Japan. Some tell the stories of those Japanese people who went overseas to flee from the poverty at home.

To preserve this "living memory" for generations to come, Kent Nagano decided to collect as many of these songs and lyrics as possible. His goal is not to simply preserve the children's songs. He is planning to reinterpret and perform these songs in order to make them accessible to a broad young audience. The renowned design artist Peter Schmidt from Hamburg will take charge of the video installations that are to accompany Kent Nagano's music on stage.

The arte/NDR television documentary "Nagano's Songs" will follow the entire artistic development of the project. Kent Nagano's biography and background will be focused on, as well as the historical background of Japanese children's songs. But the film is not a classical musical. It attempts to capture the process of making an ambitious project a reality from start to finish and looks behind the curtains to give the audience insights into the complex workings of art and music. Will this collaboration result in the mutual understanding of different cultures? Where are the boundaries in making Japanese children's stories accessible to everyone? The intention is to make the audience feel the hemisphere: What inspires Schmidt to create what we ultimately see on screen? And what made Nagano interpret these songs in the way we see it now, accompanied by Schmidt's images?

The 52 min. broadcast at the classic program "musica" is scheduled for autumn 2010.

The project is supported by The Japan Foundation, the FilmFernsehFond Bavaria, and the Hamburg/Schleswig-Holstein Film Fund Foundation. Moreover, several international co-productions are being planned. "Nagano's Songs" will thus be able to entertain millions of spectators worldwide.