

International Correspondents committee visits Taiwan cultural center

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April 20, 2023



Members of the Taiwan Symphony Orchestra played for guests at the Taiwan cultural center.

Forty journalists from the International Correspondents Committee of the Club joined 60 other guests at historic Twin Oaks estate in D.C., April 18. They were invited by the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the U.S. in celebration of the first appearance by the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center, scheduled for April 19, 2023.

Guests were treated to a concert by seven members of the orchestra, who played a program of European and Chinese music, conducted by Jun Märkl, artistic advisor to the symphony.

The Club invitees were greeted by Representative Bi-Kim Hsiao, head of the office, whose perfect idiomatic English was explained by her former status as a dual citizen of the US and Taiwan. She was born in Japan to a Taiwanese father and an American mother, and studied stateside at university and post-graduate levels. She had to renounce her American citizenship when she began her political career in Taiwan. In her formal remarks, Representative Hsiao emphasized the importance of culture, beauty, and art as characteristics of Taiwan, and urged her audience not to think of it solely as a geopolitical hot spot.

This theme was echoed in the remarks of Club President Eileen Reilly, who presented Hsiao with an NPC mug as a token of appreciation for the latter's hospitality. Similar points were made by conductor Märkl and Jenny Belfield, president of Washington Performing Arts, whose efforts helped bring the Taiwanese symphony to the Kennedy Center. Märkl noted that the soloists in the evening's concert were meant to underscore the personal dimension of the program so that listeners would relate to Taiwan as an island of individuals rather than as a headline. He pointed out that one of the evening's guests was Ke-Chia Chen, a Taiwanese composer whose latest work would have its US premiere at the Kennedy Center, and had been co-commissioned by Washington Performing Arts. Belfield reminded the audience that Taiwan and the US share a commitment to democratic values and freedom of speech.

In informal questioning, Representative Hsiao said that the People's Republic of China is Taiwan's major trading partner, claiming more than 25 per cent of total exports, but that the U.S. is the second largest, with almost 16 per cent of exports. She reminded her listeners that Taiwan produces most of the world's semiconductors (60 per cent), including over 90 per cent of the most advanced ones, so it is in the interest of the world to ensure Taiwan's continued security.

When the music and formal program ended, invitees drifted outside to enjoy a lavish buffet of Taiwanese specialties and European dishes. An unusual bonus to the menu was bubble tea, making an uncommon but refreshing appearance on a diplomatic reception table.