

Ahn Eak-tai Statue Planned in Budapest



Andrea Szego, president of the Korea-Hungary Society
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Ahn Eak-tai, composer of
the national anthem of South Korea

Greek philosopher Plato said a creative idea can't be completed alone; it has to be combined with a means of application to fulfill the creativeness.

Andrea Szego, president of the Korea-Hungary Society, keeps the quotation in full practice as she prepares for the celebration of the 20th anniversary of Korea-Hungary diplomatic relations this year, partly by erecting a statue of Ahn Eak-tai, a Korean source of national pride, who composed the national anthem of South Korea while on campus at Eotvos College in Budapest, where he boarded.

“Ahn studied at Liszt Music Academy and stayed at the dormitory of Eotvos College,” Szego said, correcting some news reports that omitted the fact that he studied at the Liszt Music Academy.

But it wasn't him just boarding there. She said it was a “prestigious” school where multiple

brilliant students were selected and got together.

Born in 1906 during the Japanese occupation of the Korean Peninsula, the music prodigy traveled abroad to study, and Hungary was one of his choices. Between 1938 and 1941, Ahn was in Hungary under Professor Zoltan Kodaly with a scholarship from the Hungarian government.

Records of his study in Hungary were first revealed to the public in 2006 by former Korean Ambassador to Hungary Eom Seock-jeong.

What Szego has in mind is a bronze statue in the front garden of the dormitory to "absolutely take everything close to the minds" of Koreans who will visit Hungary and of Hungarians who hardly know about the composer.

The statue will have Ahn's autograph in Korean, an introductory statement and a list of sponsors in Hungarian, Korean and English.

She would like to have an embedded sound system which would play Ahn's Symphonic Fantasia Korea, a formal name of the national anthem, when visitors press a button.

The application of her idea is a bit of challenge, as it involves money.

She said her project is falling short on funds, consuming her time and energy lately. Yet it won't make her steer away from the idea. "Whenever there is a good idea, money follows," she said.

Plus, support from incumbent Korean Ambassador to Hungary Suh Chung-ha helps sustain her enthusiasm.

With the estimation process under way, she hopes to get the statue ready by 2010.

Szego made herself visit the Eotvos College in January this year, conducting her own investigation of Ahn's boarding at the dormitory.

She said she was surprised how little was preserved from his accommodation there. "They didn't seem to know him or the significance of his work."

She had enough faith to convince the school authorities, and made them add his name to the list of honorary students. When she left the college, she had in her hands copies of official documents concerning Ahn, a program of his cello recital and photos of the school campus, some of which she shared during an interview.

She couldn't have been more excited when talking about the college.

"It's not just an ordinary school where Ahn studied. Only top students were selected and allowed to stay and study there," she said. Getting an invitation to lecture there is of the highest honor for scientists and novelists, she added.

Szego is staying in Seoul on the Korea Foundation Scholarship program and engrossed in learning Korean at Sogang University in Seoul.

"The president of the Hungary-Korea Society has to know Korean. Language is one of the most important mediators between cultures and nations," she said as motivation.

She has been chairing the association since its foundation in 2002. Filling in for the absence of a Korean Chamber of Commerce in Hungary, the association carries out related, she said, promoting economic ties and covering the political and cultural sectors.

Language training remains a priority of her life in Korea, yet the preparation for the 20th anniversary celebration adds complexity to her busy schedule.

June 9 will be a big day for Szego. Along with the statue project, the association will host an important conference on future perspectives on the Hungary-Korea relationship.

The conference will be the most comprehensive — yet candid — venue for dialogue discussing a broad aspect of bilateral relationships, she said.

Adding flavor to the conference is the premier of "Bibimbap music."

With the idea of "everyone contributes one element," the president asked Lee Gum-seop, a Korean composer, to compose it, a combination of Oriental and Western influences. "It's the perfect music to be played," she said.

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http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2010/08/139_43879.html