

TAKEICHIRO HIRAI



cello

PROFILE

Internationally acclaimed as one of the greatest cellists of our time, Takeichiro Hirai (b.1937) is the last survivor who inherited the legacy of great masters from the late 19th and early 20th century, having associated with Villa-Lobos, Shostakovich, Khachaturian, Britten, Kreisler, Cortot and Segovia. He has also collaborated with artists such as Menuhin, Stern, Horszowski and Serkin. Since his sensational debut in 1961 playing 4 concertos (Dvorak, Schumann, Lalo and Boccherini) under Pablo Casals conducting, Hirai has been performing regularly across the globe, appearing as a soloist with the world's leading orchestras and as a recitalist in venues such as Wigmore Hall (London), Salle Gaveau (Paris), Musikverein (Vienna), Concertgebouw (Amsterdam) and Carnegie Hall (NY), as well as in international music festivals including the Prades (France), Estherwood (Spain), Casals (Mexico) and the Marlboro (USA). Hirai has been honoured with many prestigious awards including the first prize at the Japan Music Competition (1954), the Prix Extraordinaire at the 1st Pablo Casals International Competition in Paris (1957) and the Composer's Union Prize at the Tchaikovsky International Competition (1962).

Takeichiro Hirai studied the piano and composition with his father, the renowned composer Kozaburo Hirai, before starting his cello studies under Hideo

Saito at the Toho Conservatory of Music in Tokyo. In 1957, Hirai, at the recommendation of Gregor Piatigorsky, went to Puerto Rico to study with Pablo Casals for five years. In 1961 at a press conference in New York, Casals noted: *'I have taken him with me throughout all of Europe, and I have taught him all that I know. He will be my successor!'* In 1979, he played three concertos (Haydn, Saint-Saens and Dvorak) with the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra in a single concert as both cellist and conductor to huge critical acclaim. In 1988 Hirai was invited by Nancy Reagan as special guest artist at the First World Cello Congress held in Washington, D.C. where he was a soloist as well as member of the cello quintet which involved Tortelier and Rostropovich. In 2005 Takeichiro Hirai celebrated his Golden Jubilee as a cellist, giving a special gala concert at the prestigious Tokyo Kioi Hall, performing the Bach's Solo Suite, two cello concertos, as well as the world premiere of his own *'Poem "Catalan" for cello, piano and orchestra in memories of Pablo Casals'*, finishing the programme with *'Song of the Birds'*. In 2008 he organized a new cello ensemble of 37 leading cellists of Japan, performing masterpieces of this genre as well as conducting the premiere of his new work *'Ode for cello ensemble'* in the presence of His Majesty Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko at the Suntory Hall, Tokyo. In 2009 he returns to Europe, appearing in recitals in UK, Denmark, Spain, Romania and France.

Besides his prolific activities as a cellist, Takeichiro Hirai is an avid composer of symphonic works, chamber music, choral music and lieder. He has been the chairman of the Association of Composers and Authors in Japan since 2003. He has made over 30 critically acclaimed recordings with labels including Sony, RCA and EMI.

PRESS REVIEWS

"A complete musician possessing exceptional technique and musical taste. He will be my successor."

----- Pablo Casals

"Takeichiro Hirai is a most accomplished cellist. His playing is distinguished by classicism of style, sensitivity of phrasing, beauty of tone and impeccability of intonation"

The Strad (London)

“Takeichiro Hirai admirably reconstructs the styles of the masters of all horizons.”

Le Figaro (Paris)

“An enormously gifted cellist. His playing was remarkable for a rich and mellifluous tone and excellent intonation”

Herald Tribune (NY)

“A strong and vibrant tone ... He allowed the music to flow on well.”

The Times (London)