

## Yoko Hirota, Pianist



Having been praised by the press as “*precise and keenly projective*” and demonstrating “*the highest level of proficiency*,” Japanese-Canadian pianist **Yoko Hirota** is considered one of the leading interpreters of contemporary piano repertory of her generation.

Born in Japan, Ms. Hirota began piano lessons at age four. At age six, after a successful audition for the “*Yamaha Special Advanced Course*” for exceptionally talented youth, she studied harmony, solfège, composition, and piano. She subsequently continued piano studies in Japan with the renowned pianist and pedagogue, **Masutaka Kanazawa**. After completing her high school education at Kobe College, a sister college to Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, US, Yoko entered the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo where she earned Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees in piano performance along with the *Pi Kappa Lambda* award for superior attainment in music. While at

SUNY/Buffalo, Yoko studied piano with **Livingston Gearhart** and contemporary music literature with late **Yvar Mikhashoff**. She gained invaluable insight into the compositional structure and performance of contemporary repertoire through interaction with many distinguished composers including **Elliott Carter**, **John Cage**, **Morton Feldman** (professor of composition at SUNY/Buffalo at the time), **Louis Andriessen**, **Bryan Ferneyhough**, **Lukas Foss** and **Donald Erb**. After graduate studies at SUNY/Buffalo, Yoko pursued her commitment to contemporary piano literature with the prominent Canadian pianist and pedagogue, **Louis-Philippe Pelletier**, at McGill University. She received her doctoral degree in piano performance from that institution in 1999.

In addition to studies in North America, grants from the **Canada Council for the Arts** allowed Ms. Hirota to study in Europe with renowned interpreters of contemporary piano music such as **Gabor Eckhardt** and **Gabor Csalog** at The Liszt Academy of Music and The Bartók Music Conservatory in Hungary, **Herbert Henck** in Germany, and **Florent Boffard**, former pianist with **L'Ensemble InterContemporain** and professor at Le Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris, France.

Ms. Hirota is a strong advocate of contemporary music, in particular music by Canadian composers. She has performed across North America, Europe, and Japan. Her solo recitals are characterized by their distinctive themes such as “*The Course of Twentieth-Century Piano Works by Canadian, American, and Japanese Composers*,” in which the music of past and contemporary composers are featured. Ms. Hirota’s “*Hungarian Piano Music from 1850 to present*” programme was the focus of a 2003 tour and included the complex, demanding piano music of two renowned contemporary composers: **György Kurtág** and **György Ligeti**. In addition to such solo recitals, Ms. Hirota is also recognized for her performances of traditional and contemporary concerto repertory. Recently she performed the world premier of “*Oiseau de Givre*” a concerto written for her by Canadian composer, **Robert Lemay**, commissioned by and performed with the **Sudbury Symphony**.

In addition to an active and very successful solo career, Ms. Hirota is highly regarded for her contemporary chamber ensemble skills. She has performed with many renowned musicians including violinist **Fritz Gearhart** (formerly with the Chester Quartet), Russian-Canadian cellist **Yegor Dyachkov**, and saxophonist **Jean-François Guay**, President of the **Quebec Saxophone Association**. She has performed in numerous concert series including **Silver Birch Concerts** (Ontario) where she is a regular guest, the **Domaine Forget International Music Festival** (Quebec), the **Many-One Concert Series** (New York City), and the **Ottawa International**

**Chamber Music Festival** (Ottawa). Ms. Hirota was invited by the notable ensemble, the **Nouvel Ensemble Moderne (NEM)**, to Canadian premiere the challenging work, *Joy* (for 23 musicians and tape), by the renowned Finnish composer, **Magnus Lindberg**. Her performance was highly praised in the **Montreal Gazette**.

Ms. Hirota is a strong advocate of the music of our time and in particular music by Canadian composers. Her performances are often broadcast on Société Radio-Canada and include **Schoenberg's Opus 23**, **Takemitsu's Piano Distance** and his chamber work, *Quatrin II*, **Denisov's Sonate pour Saxophone et Piano**, **Luciano Berio's Due Pezzi**, solo music by Canadian composer **Gary Kulesha**, and the world premiere of "*In the dark ... hommage à Lars von Trier*" by Canadian composer, **Robert Lemay**.

Yoko Hirota's excellence in contemporary music interpretation is reflected in the many broadcasts of her performances on **Société Radio-Canada**, and the many awards she has received. She is the recipient of numerous scholarships from such prestigious institutions as the Aspen School of Music, Long Island Summer Chamber Music Festival, McGill University, and the **Canada Council for the Arts**. Other professional accomplishments include semi-finalist at the **Nutley Symphony Orchestra's Concerto Competition** and winner of the **SUNY/Buffalo's Baird Concerto Competition** where she performed the brilliant, virtuosic Piano Concerto No. 3 by **Prokofiev**. At the 1996 **Clara Liechtenstein Piano Competition** (Montreal), the jury requested the creation of a Special Mention Prize in order to distinguish Ms. Hirota's excellence in the interpretation of twentieth century repertoire.

Ms. Hirota's professional activities also include recordings. Her first CD, "*The Piano Music of Arnold Schoenberg with 17 Fragments*," was released to critical acclaim and was listed as one of Essential Tracks by **The Globe and Mail**. Her latest CD "*Small is Beautiful: Miniature Piano Pieces*", a project made possible through prestigious grants from the **Canada Council for the Arts** and **Ontario Arts Council** featuring sixteen concise 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century piano works, was released in 2009.

In addition to her performance career, Ms. Hirota is a passionate educator. Her scholarly articles include "*Analytical Perspectives on Bartok's Sonata for Violin and Piano, No. 1*" published in **Acta Musicologica**, as well as reviews for the **International Double Reed Society**, the **Tuba Journal** and the **CAML Review (Canadian Association of Music Library)**. Yoko's "*Teaching Contemporary Piano Music*" workshops are in high demand across North America as are her informative lecture/recital presentations. She has been invited to give similar presentations at music conferences sponsored by the **Canadian University Music Society** and the **College Music Society**, and at a concert sponsored by **Dr. Allen Forte** of Yale University. She is Professor of Piano and Chair of the Music Department at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario, and co-founder and co-artistic director of **5-Penny New Music Concerts**.

For more information please visit: [www.yokohirota.com](http://www.yokohirota.com) and [www.5pennynewmusic.ca](http://www.5pennynewmusic.ca).  
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