

# Universal Melodies of Hope

## An Awe-Inspiring Performance by Motoki Hirai

By Brittany Karima Cesarini

"A brilliant and sensitive musical talent both as pianist and composer." –The Guardian



A Japanese native born in Tokyo in 1973, Motoki Hirai was surrounded by a family of passionate and gifted musicians from an early age. In 1996, he studied philosophy and aesthetics at Kieo University in Tokyo

before going on to study at the Royal Academy of Music in London, the Guildhall School of Music, and City University.

Motoki has performed at prestigious venues around the world, from Carnegie Hall in New York to Smith

Square and Cadogan Hall in London. He has also given recitals in his native Japan, Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia, Scotland, Spain,

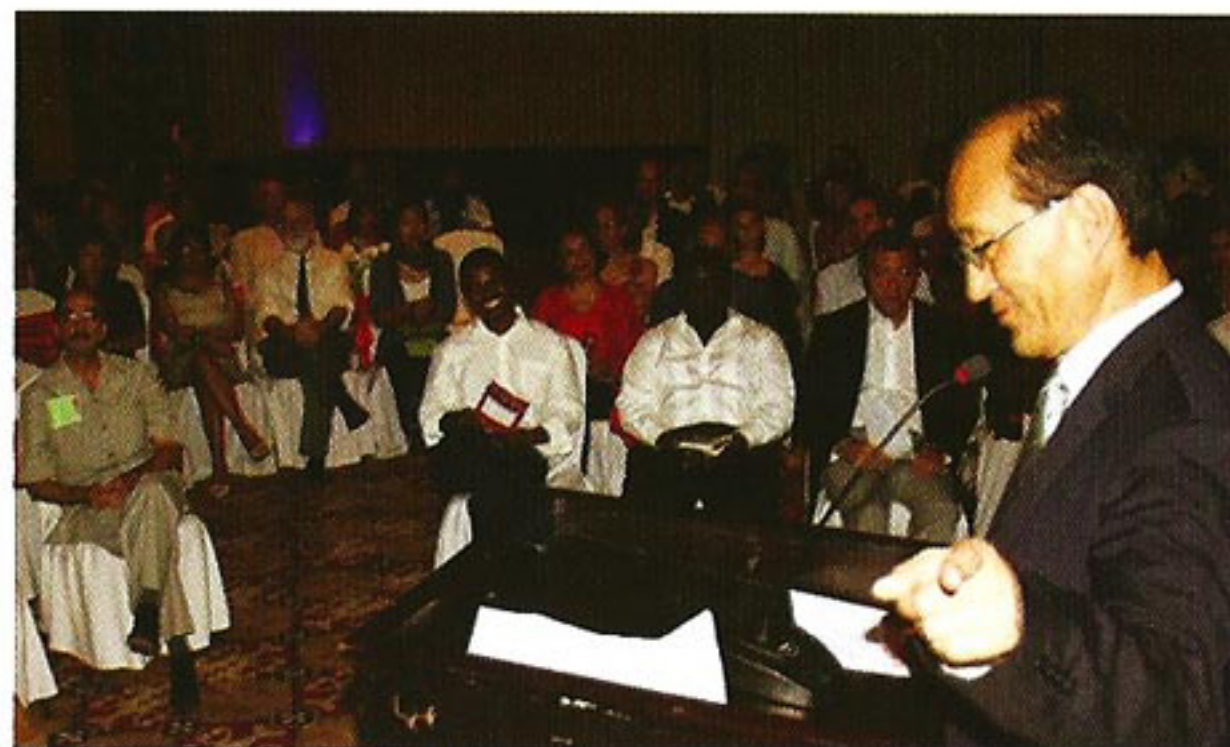
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Switzerland, USA, and Wales. In addition, Motoki has composed a number of works for international artists, thus extending his reach even further around the globe.

Motoki has gained a reputation for imagination, sensitivity, and excellence that is paralleled by few other pianists, if any, of his generation. His recitals include his own renditions of the works of classic pianists, as well as a growing collection of works composed by Motoki himself.

The recital in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on 29 September 2012 marked Motoki's first visit and his first performance in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sponsored by the Embassy of Japan, the Japanese Society of Tanzania, and Dar es Salaam Serena Hotel, the event was held in Serena's beautiful Kivukoni Ballroom. Invited guests began to arrive at 6:30 PM and were treated to a variety of Japanese and Tanzanian appetizers and drinks. Around 7:15 PM, the diverse crowd shifted into the performance hall, decorated in crisp white and bright red to symbolize the colors of the Japanese flag.

From the moment Motoki walked onto the stage and sat down at the majestic grand piano, a renovated throwback from the 1830's, all eyes and ears were on him. His fingers seemed to effortlessly glide across the keys as his whole body



moved in consonance with the notes he was playing.

Motoki opened the recital with *L'estro Armonico* Op. 3-No. 11, RV565 by Antonio Vivaldi and Johann S. Bach, and Sonata No. 14 in C# minor, Op. 27-2 'Moonlight' by Ludwig van Beethoven. He then played two original pieces to round out the first half of the performance. The first, called *Grace and Hope*, was composed after the devastating earthquake and tsunami hit Japan on 11 March 2011. Motoki said that his wish for this work is that it "be performed repeatedly to give people hope and courage." His second original work of the evening, titled "Scenes from a Native Land", was composed in 2005 in honor of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War II and draws on traditional themes from Motoki's own childhood in rural Japan. The composer explained that he wrote this piece "as a memorial to the past and hope for lasting peace and stability of the world for the future."

In the second half of the recital, Motoki continued

to wow the audience with pieces by Polish composer Ignacy Jan Paderewski (*Minuet in G*, Op. 14-1), Spanish composer Isaac Albeniz *Tango* (Op. 165-2 from *Espana*), two works by Frederick Chopin (*Etude*, Op. 25-1 'Aeolian Harp' and *Nocturne in C# minor*, Op. Posth.). He finished up with a dazzling rendition of Edvard Grieg's *Wedding day at Troldhagen*, Op. 65-6. The audience could barely hold back its applause until the end of each piece. At the conclusion of the scheduled program, guests wasted no time in rising to their feet and demanding an encore. Motoki went on to play four encores, and finished out the recital to deafening applause.

We sincerely thank Motoki Hirai for an inspiring performance, and we are also grateful to the sponsors who made this event possible. We look forward to seeing many more impressive performers and artists bringing their talents to Dar!

For more information about Motoki Hirai, see his detailed profile at <http://www.motoki-hirai.com>.