



# Motoki Hirai piano

Thursday, 27 February 2014 – 7:30pm



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## PROGRAMME

**J.S.Bach (arr. Motoki Hirai): Organ Concerto in D minor, BWV596 after Vivaldi**

*[New Arrangement – UK première]*

- I. Andante Maestoso - Grave
- II. Largo (Tempo di Siciliana)
- III. Toccata (finale)

**Motoki Hirai: Grace and Hope (2011) – dedicated to the victims and survivors  
of the earthquake and tsunami**

**Motoki Hirai: Scenes from a Native Land (2005)**

*(‘Fantasie-Japonaise’)*

**Tchaikovsky: Dumka – Scene in a Russian Village, Op.59**

### INTERVAL

**Edvard Grieg: Poetic Tone Picture, Op.3–4**

- : Norwegian Dance, Op.35–2
- : Scherzo, Op.54–5 from Lyric Pieces
- : At the Cradle, Op.68–5 from Lyric Pieces
- : Dance Caprice, Op.28–3 from Album Leaves
- : Anitra’s Dance, Op.46–3 from Peer Gynt Suite No. 1
- : Gone (In Memoriam), Op.71–6 from Lyric Pieces

**Motoki Hirai: Homage to Grieg (1987/rev.2007)**

**Motoki Hirai: Improvisation on EDvArD GriEG (2014)**

*[New Work – UK première]*

**Edvard Grieg: Arietta, Op.12–1 from Lyric Pieces**

- : Little Bird, Op.43–4 from Lyric Pieces
- : To the Spring, Op.43–6 from Lyric Pieces
- : Solitary Traveller, Op.43–2 from Lyric Pieces
- : Wedding Day at Troldhaugen, Op.65–6 from Lyric Pieces

## Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

**Concerto in D minor (after Vivaldi) BWV 596 –  
arr. Motoki Hirai [UK première]**

- I. **Andante Maestoso – Grave**
- II. **Largo (Tempo di Siciliana)**
- III. **Toccata (finale)**

Whilst a century and more ago much of the music performed in orchestral concerts and in chamber music and solo recitals had been written in the previous 60 years, the generally-held belief that music of the 18th-century was almost wholly unknown in the 19th is not entirely true. Beethoven, for example, greatly admired Handel's music, and, following Mendelssohn's ground-breaking performance of Bach's St Matthew Passion in 1829, a wholesale revival of interest in Bach's music began, but the revival of interest in Mozart's music during the 19th century took somewhat longer to become established.

As knowledge of music of the baroque period grew in the 19th-century, a little-appreciated feature was the interest taken by those earlier composers in the music of their contemporaries: Handel's oratorio *Israel in Egypt* recomposes and recycles music by Stradella and Rameau; Mozart made a reorchestration of Handel's *Messiah* and Bach's interest in the music of his contemporaries was particularly wide, to the extent that in 1713–14, for example, he arranged no fewer than nine concertos by Vivaldi as solo organ and harpsichord works. One of them, from the twelve Concertos that make up Vivaldi's *Opus 3*, 'L'estro armonico', opens tonight's programme, but in a newly transcribed version for solo piano by Motoki Hirai, receiving its UK premiere.

The original is one of Vivaldi's better-known works: it is a concerto grosso, for two main solo violins, plus solo cello and string orchestra with continuo; Bach's version for organ has itself a chequered history, having come down for its publication in 1844 as being not by him but by his son Wilhelm Friedrich; subsequent research, however, has established that the transcription is by the Master himself.

However Bach's transcription was made, there is no doubt that his 'recomposition' has presented us with an eminently valid keyboard work, and Motoki Hirai's new version, for the modern concert grand piano, is what might be termed a 'transcription of a transcription'. As the great Bach scholar Basil Lam claimed: 'It is possible to play Bach's music on a clothes line with a couple of pegs yet it remains great music', but we must admire the inherent respect and success of tonight's arrangement – especially when performed by the musician who has made it possible.

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## Motoki Hirai (1973–)

**Grace and Hope (2011) –  
*dedicated to the victims and survivors of the  
earthquake and tsunami.***

It has been nearly three years since the devastating Earthquake and Tsunami, with the ensuing nuclear fall-out, hit my native country of Japan on the 11th of March (which, by a sad coincidence, was my birthday). I have so far organized and participated in over 20 charity concerts to raise funds for the rebuilding of lives and livelihoods, as a result of which I feel that the path to full recovery could be extremely long, though disaster relief is definitely underway.

I composed this piece following the 3.11 disaster, not only as a prayer for the victims and the survivors, but also hoping that such a tragedy would never happen again. My main goal was to come up with a universal and simple melody that can be shared among people not only in Japan but across the world, to reflect my sincere wish that the world will be a better, more peaceful place in which to live for us all. I premièred the piece at my piano recital at the Wigmore Hall, London in October 2011, and gave its Japan premiere in Shichigahama, Miyagi (epicentre of the Tsunami) the following month.

Whilst I am performing the piece on solo piano today, it can easily be transcribed for choir, orchestra or solo instruments as it is ultimately a simple song. I have always been hearing the theme through human voices whilst composing or playing on the piano since I conceived it at the very beginning. If it could be performed repeatedly to give people hope and courage, it will give me sheer delight as a composer.

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## Motoki Hirai (1973–)

**Scenes from a Native Land (2005)**

This piece reflects my concern with a number of issues which affect us today. Composed in 2005 which marked the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, I thought it was an appropriate time to pause for thought. After 60 odd years of relative peace, there are still many conflicts as well as natural disasters which affect the lives of vast numbers of people from all over the world. I now offer this composition as a memorial to the past and with hopes for lasting peace and stability of the world for the future.

As it was originally composed for a concert held at St. John's, Smith Square in London on Europe Day as part of the 2005 EU-Japan Year of People-to-People Exchanges, an EU-wide initiative to promote a greater mutual understanding of European and Japanese society and culture,

I, as a Japanese person, have drawn on images evocative of my native land and its rural life past and present in all its forms, including landscapes, tranquility, folk festivals, even religious themes and legends.

The piece itself consists of several sections of varying lengths played continuously, representing scenes from Japanese rural life including sounds of nature, children at play, dancing and singing in a small village, and traditional instruments such as bamboo flute and Taiko drum. Another section is based on the Okinawa pentatonic scale which consists of five notes, uniquely skipping the second and sixth of the octave. Although some motifs have been influenced by Japanese folk styles, I have not used any particular source for my composition.

As music is a live art, I have focused on improvisation whilst composing this piece in order to make the performance more spontaneous. With this in mind, I hope members of the audience will let their imagination run freely and just enjoy what they hear.

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## Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

### *Dumka*, Op.59 (1886)

Tchaikovsky's love of Mozart's music was well-known; he published an edition of *Le nozze di Figaro* and his Fourth Orchestral Suite, Opus 61, *Mozartiana*, is a set of orchestrations of four of Mozart's works, composed soon after Tchaikovsky wrote this delightful solo piano piece in C minor, marked *Andantino cantabile*, which paints a picture akin to a rustic Russian scene. The *Dumka* was composed in February 1886 and is dedicated to Antoine Marmontel. It was written in response to a request from a Parisian music publisher, Felix Mackar, who by all accounts was delighted with the result. So he should have been, for this is one of the finest of all of Tchaikovsky's shorter solo piano works, although it is far from being a miniature. The dedicatee, Antoine Marmontel, was professor of the piano class at the Paris Conservatoire.

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## Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)

Poetic Tone Picture, Op.3 no 4 (1863)

Norwegian Dance, Op.35 no 2 (1881)

Scherzo, Op.54 no 5 from

*Lyric Pieces Book V* (1891)

At the Cradle, Op.68 no 5 from

*Lyric Pieces Book IX* (1898)

Dance Caprice, Op.28 no 3 from

*Album Leaves* (1878)

Anitra's Dance, Op.46 no 3 from

*Peer Gynt Suite No. 1* (1875)

Gone (In Memoriam), Op.71 no 6 from

*Lyric Pieces Book X* (1901)

Arietta, Op.12 no 1 from

*Lyric Pieces Book I* (1866)

Little Bird, Op.43 no 4 from

*Lyric Pieces Book III* (1886)

To the Spring, Op.43 no 6 from

*Lyric Pieces Book III* (1886)

Solitary Traveller, Op.43 no 2 from

*Lyric Pieces Book III* (1886)

Wedding Day at Troldhaugen, Op.65 no 6 from

*Lyric Pieces Book VIII* (1896)

As Tchaikovsky added to Mozart's music in his Fourth Suite, so Edvard Grieg did the same for four of Mozart's piano sonatas, publishing versions with an added second piano part – the original is played on the first piano. A mutual love of Mozart's music – and the desire to do something practical to spread knowledge of it – was but one of the attractions each composer felt for the other's art, and whilst the 150th anniversary of Grieg's birth in 1993 coincided with the 100th of Tchaikovsky's death, the anniversaries affording excellent opportunities to focus attention on these remarkable composers, it may still be thought that the more original achievements of both men are not as wholly appreciated as they might be, even today. Although, in each case, they came to prominence at the time of the rise of nationalism in art, and there were great Russian and Scandinavian musicians before them, in some ways it was their contemporary use of folk-based material that both separated and united their approach to music, and the range of music they created remains far wider than is generally appreciated – as was the influence they exerted upon their successors.

Tchaikovsky and Grieg met at a famous party in Leipzig on New Year's Eve 1887, at which Brahms and the English composer Ethel Smyth were also present: by that time, their mutual admiration ran deep. Tchaikovsky once wrote of Grieg: 'What charm, what inimitable and rich musical imagery! What warmth and passion in his melodic phrases, what teeming vitality in his harmony, what beauty and originality in the turn of his piquant and ingenious modulations and rhythms, and in all the rest what interest, novelty, and independence.'

And Grieg of Tchaikovsky: 'His Russian art – which I regard as so significant because of its grand conception, richness of colour, and advanced technique – can never be taken away from me. I carry it in my heart with endless gratitude.'

Hearing the generous selection of Grieg's solo piano music in tonight's recital, it is impossible not to agree with Tchaikovsky, for we begin with one of the composer's very earliest solo piano pieces, from the set of six Poetic Tone Pictures, composed in 1863 and the first of his works to be published.

It was Dr Max Abraham of Peters Edition who had first discerned Grieg's original qualities in these pieces and had undertaken to publish them

that same year, an association between composer and publishing house that was to last until the composer's death 44 years later.

Hearing this early example from the Poetic Tone Pictures it is clear that the qualities we regard (as did Tchaikovsky) as essentially Griegian were there from the start. And although Grieg's influence in turn on a surprisingly wide range of succeeding composers is today little-appreciated, four months before Bartók's death in 1945, he told the conductor Antal Dorati: 'Altogether, one has to take Grieg very seriously. He was a very important composer. Don't you know he was one of the first of us who threw away the German yoke and turned to the music of his own people?'

Nor is it at all well-known that the first commission Serge Diaghilev gave Stravinsky in 1909 was to orchestrate a group of Grieg's piano pieces for the Ballets Russes – sadly, these orchestrations have been lost, neither do we know which pieces Diaghilev chose – but within the large number of short piano pieces, principally perhaps from the 66 which make up the ten books of Lyric Pieces composed between 1866–1901 we may find distilled the essence of Grieg's genius, from the very first, the Arietta which opens book 1, to the most famous, Wedding Day at Troldhaugen of 1896 – composed to mark the silver wedding anniversary of Grieg and his wife Nina at their home, Troldhaugen, just outside Bergen, and which originally had the title 'The celebrators are coming' (i.e., the guests, walking up the hill on that beautiful summer's day in 1892 to the fine house which was built for the couple with money advanced by Max Abraham's publishing company).

Thus the 'poetic tone pictures' from Grieg's earliest years continued throughout his creative life. He often drew pictorial inspiration from a variety of sources, as the titles of the individual pieces reveal, and which continue to exert their fascination through, as Tchaikovsky wrote: such 'inimitable and rich musical imagery!'

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## Motoki Hirai (1973–)

### Hommage à Grieg (1987/rev.2007)

Whilst receiving its world première in London's Wigmore Hall in 2007 commemorating the centenary of Edvard Grieg's death, 'Hommage à Grieg' was originally conceived in 1987. From early childhood I have been familiar with and greatly admired the work of Grieg, and have always enjoyed listening to the composer playing his own compositions on old gramophone records that he made in 1903. Amazing as it may sound, the composer appeared one night in my dream, seated at his old upright piano with candlesticks, smiling and improvising especially for me in his studio in Troldhaugen. On waking I immediately jotted down what I had heard, and that formed the basis of the piece I will play for you this evening.

In this piece I have tried to capture through a tone picture the unique stillness of Nordic nature and atmosphere which Grieg himself would have experienced especially in the winter. In the middle section I have included what I imagine to be the sounds of reindeer sleigh rides gradually approaching from afar, whilst the distinctive and increasing sounds can be heard of numerous church bells being rung in harmony by campanologists throughout old Bergen where the composer grew up.

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## Motoki Hirai (1973–)

### Improvisation on EDvArD GriEG (2014)

#### [UK première]

As one might guess from the title, the main motif of this piece consists of the seven letters within the name of Edvard Grieg which correspond to musical notes. This traditional technique has been used by various composers for many years, for example in Schumann's 'ABEGG Variations, Op.1', 'Carnaval - Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes (Little Scenes on Four Notes), Op.9', and Liszt's 'Prelude and Fugue on BACH', to name but a few.

It was just by chance that I came up with the idea of using Edvard Grieg's name as a motif for my composition. When I was requested to give a solo recital featuring Grieg at the Norwegian Ambassador's Residence in London, organised by the Greig Society of Great Britain in October 2013, I tried playing the notes 'Edvard Grieg' at the piano without much thought or planning. At first glance, I thought the letters that could be used were the seven letters: 'E, D, A, D, G, E, G' (this is when read in English – there may be other possibilities in German for instance). After playing these notes a couple of times, the second last 'E' naturally became prolonged to double the length of the other notes, forming a four-beat cradle-like rhythm. From then on, the music just flowed through my head, and I was just improvising until the end of the piece. This has formed the basis of 'Improvisation on EDvArD GriEG'.

I gave an unofficial première of the piece at the above-mentioned concert where it was not included in the programme but was done as a surprise performance. However, I made further updates to the piece later, giving the world première in its completed, official form in Carnegie Hall (Weill Recital Hall) in New York on February 5th 2014.

The quiet and gentle motif comprising the seven letters 'E, D, A, D, G, E - G' is repeated throughout the piece, gradually increasing its intensity until the climax where it is interrupted for a while, followed by a coda with the completely different melody reminiscent of lieder or chamber music by Grieg. After this, the cradle-like motif is re-introduced, leading to an absolutely quiet ending.

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## Profile: Motoki Hirai – Pianist & Composer



**"a most brilliant and sensitive musical talent both as pianist and composer"**

*THE GUARDIAN*

Acclaimed worldwide for his imagination and sensitivity, Motoki Hirai has appeared in the music capitals of the Far East, America and Europe, performing regularly in prestigious venues including Wigmore Hall in London and Carnegie Hall in New York. During recent years, Motoki has performed in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Malaysia, Oman, Palestine, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Tanzania, UK, USA and his native Japan.

Highlights of the current season and beyond include solo recitals in Carnegie Hall (NY), Royal Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Konzerthaus (Vienna), South Bank Centre (London), Ginza Oji Hall and Kioi Hall (Tokyo) and concerto performances with orchestras such as Czech Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra as well as concert tours across Europe, Middle East, Africa, South America and Japan.

Whilst being a leading interpreter of the standard repertoire for piano solo, Motoki is equally at home with chamber music and lieder, shedding an inspiring and personal light on music from all periods. Since 1991, Motoki has collaborated with several artists including Vilnius String Quartet, Michael Cox, Kalman Berkes, Barry Craft, and his father, the celebrated cellist Takeichiro Hirai, whom Pablo Casals once designated as his successor.

As a composer, Motoki's works have been performed and premiered in venues such as Carnegie Hall (NY); National Cherry Blossom Festival (Washington, D.C.); Wigmore Hall, South Bank Centre, Cadogan Hall, St. John's Smith Square, Unicorn Theatre, Chelsea Flower Show (London); St. George's (Bristol); Eden Project (Cornwall); Lincoln Cathedral (Lincolnshire); Smetana Hall (Prague); Cultural Summer Festival (Bratislava); Maison de la culture du Japon à Paris (Paris); Auditori Pau Casals (Barcelona); Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv, Auditorium in Haifa Museum of Art (Israel); as well as La Folle Journée, Tokyo Opera City and NHK Hall (Tokyo).

To commemorate the centenary of Grieg's death in 2007, Motoki premiered his own piano work 'Homage à Grieg' in venues such as Wigmore Hall and Tsuda Hall (Tokyo), in performances which were critically acclaimed by the press internationally including the Norwegian leading newspaper *Aftenposten*. His music has also been used in films such as 'Voice' (2004) and 'The Emperor's Tram Girls' (2005).

Born in Tokyo in 1973 into a highly gifted musical family, Motoki Hirai studied piano and composition with his grandfather, the eminent composer Kozaburo Y. Hirai, and violin with his grandmother. Since his first professional appearance at the age of 13 playing his own piano works to great critical acclaim, he has been highly active in both performance and composition. After reading philosophy and aesthetics at Keio University in Tokyo, Motoki came to London in 1996 to study at the Royal Academy of



Music, and later at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Over the years, Motoki Hirai has performed for the promotion of world peace and for people in need worldwide in association with organizations such as the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, Japan Society, Motor Neurone Disease Association, Red Cross, UNESCO and UNICEF. In 2010 Motoki was invited to Lithuania to give a charity concert, commemorating Sempo (Chiune) Sugihara who saved the lives of over 6000 Polish Jews during World War II. Since the Earthquake and Tsunami devastated Japan on 11 March 2011 (which, by a sad coincidence, was his birthday), Motoki has been giving a series of charity concerts for fundraising, supported by Steinway & Sons, across the UK and Europe and the most affected areas in Japan, raising over £75,000 so far.

As an artistic emissary of the Japanese government, Motoki has visited numerous countries since 1994. He has also been involved in fascinating educational programmes to promote Japanese art and culture across the world, such as the 'World of Japanese Picture Books – brought to life through Reading and Music' project (2007-) as artistic director, producer and composer. Motoki has broadcast internationally on radio and television (Classic FM, BBC, ITV, and NHK) and has made a number of CD recordings.

[www.motoki-hirai.com](http://www.motoki-hirai.com)

## REVIEWS

"a superb pianist...  
his musicianship is incomparable"

*THE GUARDIAN*

"Consistent musicality..."

Being a composer himself has endowed the performer [Motoki Hirai] a special insight into the works of others, enabling him to capture the essential character of each composition."

*THE SUNDAY TIMES*

"His interpretation was refined and left a strong impression on the audience. It was as though the doors to the most sublime music of our time were being opened note by note right before our eyes."

*EL MUNDO*

"...superbly performed, technically perfect and infused with keen intelligence"

*MUSICAL OPINION*

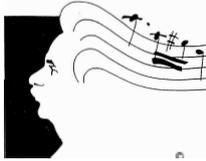
"Mr. Hirai's unhurried approach and ample breathing between phrases brought to mind a great singer or string player . . . warm lyricism and a uniquely improvisatory feeling"

*NEW YORK CONCERT REVIEW*

Supported by: Embassy of Japan in the UK



In Association with: The Grieg Society of Great Britain, The Japan Society\*, The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity\*, Steinway & Sons



*\*Proceeds from this concert will go to the Japan Society Tohoku Earthquake Relief Fund, for the rebuilding of lives and livelihoods through local projects in the most affected areas, which will need years of continuous support.*

*\*The artist has worked in association with the Royal Marsden Cancer Charity to invite children fighting against cancer alongside their families, in order to encourage them and give them hope for the future.*

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