

**CRITICAL ACCLAIM**  
**FOR SAPPORO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA IN LONDON**  
**May 2011**

*They were warmly greeted, and they left with a standing ovation... The Sapporo players are particularly intense and acute listeners. This was apparent throughout the concerto, and it made their Shostakovich Fifth Symphony entirely compelling. Their music director, Tadaaki Otaka, seemed to have the weight and measure of every bar of the work deep inside him. While the cellos brought a down-draught of power to the opening, the quality and voice of every entry was precisely focused within Otaka's strong structural sense. Each section of the orchestra seemed to be honing itself against another, each player pushing the next to their limits. The scherzo worked with an almost mechanized obedience, setting into relief the flute's single human voice of hope. That solo voice sang within a slow movement whose dense concentration grew almost imperceptibly to a white-hot intensity, before a sudden plunge once more into the cellos' dark territory and a finale ablaze with energy.*

The Times (Hilary Finch May 24 2011)

*This beautiful performance was a reminder that Japanese composer Takemitsu's fluttering sounds can add up to something enduring. Rating: \* \* \* \**  
*With Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony a sense of emotional engagement came surging back... I've rarely heard the slow movement's sense of tragedy expressed with such choked eloquence, as if mourning something "too deep for tears."*

*After the performance, Otaka reminded us of the suffering of his countrymen in the Japanese earthquake, and led the orchestra in a performance of Nimrod from the Enigma Variations in their memory. But the Shostakovich had already said it all.*

Daily Telegraph (Ivan Hewett May 24 2011)

*This was inevitably an emotionally charged evening that drew some high-octane playing, especially in Shostakovich's appropriately indomitable Fifth Symphony...Every performance of the Shostakovich is likely to be overshadowed for a while yet by Andris Nelsons's towering account with the LSO in the autumn. But Otaka and his orchestra were almost in the same league. The disciplined austerity of their playing was immensely convincing, with the Sapporo strings particularly impressive. Shostakovich's Fifth was an assertion of musical values in Russia's dark times. Its message was no less unerring today in Japan's.*

The Guardian (Martin Kettle May 23 2011)