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## SAPPORO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CELEBRATES 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

2011 EUROPEAN TOUR CONDUCTED  
BY TADAAKI OTAKA WITH  
GUEST SOLOIST AKIKO SUWANAI



**ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL LONDON 23 MAY 2011 7.30pm**

Presented by Askonas Holt Ltd

A visit to the UK by a major Japanese orchestra is a rare event these days. Distinguished Japanese conductor **Tadaaki Otaka** brings the **Sapporo Symphony Orchestra** to London as part of a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary European tour in May 2011. For its second only visit to the UK (the first was ten years ago, also under the baton of Otaka) the orchestra brings a programme of **Takemitsu's *How Slow the Wind***, **Bruch's *Violin Concerto No 1 in G minor*** – with celebrated Japanese violinist **Akiko Suwanai** - and **Shostakovich's *Symphony No 5 in D minor***.

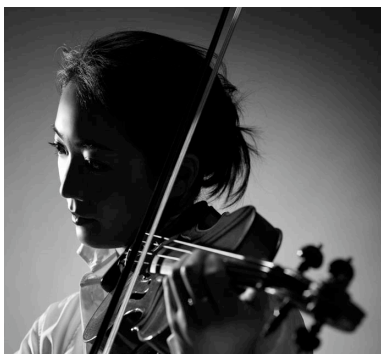
Tadaaki Otaka's association with the Sapporo Symphony Orchestra (affectionately known as *Sakkyo* by audiences at home in Hokkaido), in the concert hall and recording studio, is a long one: he has held the current position of Principal Conductor since 1998 and was previously Resident Conductor 1981-86. He has been associated with practically all the major Japanese orchestras, as well with many international ones and is well known in the UK for his dedication to performing the works of British composers and also his tenure with BBC National Orchestra of Wales - to which he was first appointed in 1996 and where he is now Conductor Laureate.

He comments: *"I have had the pleasure to work with the Sapporo Symphony Orchestra for the last 17 years - they are like my extended family! It is wonderful to mark this occasion of their 50<sup>th</sup> birthday with a tour to Europe, especially with the development of the orchestra over the last decade. I am very much looking forward to performing Shostakovich's Symphony No.5 - which is one of my favourite symphonies - in front of London's fantastic audience."*

The SSO is based at the Sapporo Concert Hall Kitara, which opened in 1997 and is world renowned for its fine acoustics. The Orchestra rose to international fame in the 1980s when it recorded Takemitsu's soundtrack for Kurosawa's blockbuster film, *Ran*, and enjoys loyal support from Hokkaido audiences through its successful subscription series: since 2005 the number of annual subscription concerts has doubled and concerts are frequently sold out.



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Guest soloist **Akiko Suwanai**, the youngest ever winner of the International Tchaikovsky Competition, enjoys superstar status in her homeland. Praised for the poise, power and clarity of her playing, she is in demand with the world's most highly regarded orchestras and conductors (her relationship with conductor Tadaaki Otaka goes back 20 years). She plays one of the most famous known violins in existence today, the 1714 Stradivarius 'Dolphin' that previously belonged to Jascha Heifetz.

The Royal Festival Hall concert is one part of Sapporo Symphony Orchestra's wider European visit, which includes Munich, Bologna, Düsseldorf, Bergamo and Brescia and is managed by Askonas Holt Ltd.

### **Press information**

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### Notes to Editors

#### **Royal Festival Hall Box Office**

**Tel. 0844 875 0073 [www.southbankcentre.co.uk](http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk)**

**Tickets £10-£30**

#### **TADAAKI OTAKA, CBE**

At the start of 2010/11 Season Otaka became Artistic Director at the New National Theatre, Tokyo and has also recently been appointed Permanent Conductor of the NHK Symphony, Tokyo and Principal Guest Conductor of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. He is Conductor Laureate at BBC National Orchestra of Wales (BBC NOW) – to which he was appointed in 1996 – and Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra. He is also Music Adviser and Principal Conductor of the Kioi Sinfonietta Tokyo, which he founded in 1995 and swiftly established as one of Japan's best chamber ensembles. His regular commitments across Japan include Nagoya and Japan Philharmonic orchestras, Osaka Symphony and special concerts in celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra. Otaka was Permanent Conductor of the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra for twenty years, during which time he toured extensively with them in the Far East and Europe, becoming their Conductor Laureate in 1991. As Principal Conductor of the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra 1992-1998, he has made many notable recordings with them and led their extensive and well-received European tour in his final season. He is a well-known figure in the UK through his work with BBC NOW, his many Proms appearances and engagements with such orchestras as City of Birmingham Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National, Hallé, Bournemouth Symphony, BBC Symphony, London Symphony, London Philharmonic and English Chamber Orchestra. For three years he was also Director of the Britten-Pears Orchestra.

With BBC NOW he has recorded for Nimbus, BIS and Chandos. With Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra in 1998 he recorded Britten's *Peter Grimes* with a cast led by Anthony Rolfe Johnson and Josephine Barstow. His first disc as Principal Guest Conductor of Melbourne Symphony will be released on ABC Classics in the near future.

Otaka is a recipient of the prestigious Suntory Music Award, given each year to the most impressive individual Japanese musician or ensemble. In 1993 the Welsh College of Music and Drama conferred an Honorary Fellowship on him and he also holds an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Wales. In 1997, he was awarded the CBE, in recognition of his outstanding contribution over many years to British musical life, and in November 2000 was awarded the Elgar Medal by the Elgar Society to mark a compelling record of conducting the composer's works overseas.

<http://www.askonasholt.co.uk/artists/conductors/tadaaki-otaka>

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## **SAPPORO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Originally founded on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1961 as the Sapporo Citizen Symphony, Hokkaido's only professional orchestra was renamed the Sapporo Symphony Orchestra the following year. Since then more than 5.6 million Hokkaido residents have known it affectionately as "Sakkyo". Masao Araya served as the first Principal Conductor from 1961 to 1968 and led the foundation of the orchestra, conducting its first subscription performance on September 16 1961. To honour Araya for his outstanding contribution, the orchestra conferred the title of Honorary Founding Conductor on him in 1997. Araya's successor, Austrian conductor Peter Schwarz (1969 to 1975) refined the orchestra's sound and led its first recording (Beethoven's Symphony No 3) and first overseas tour to the US and Germany. Hiroyuki Iwaki became the Principal Conductor in 1975, Music Director in 1978 and, from 1988 until his death in 2006, he served as the Conductor Laureate. Iwaki was dedicated to the promotion of works by Japanese composers including Toru Takemitsu. With Iwaki the orchestra created a sensation with its recording of Takemitsu's soundtrack for Akira Kurosawa's film, *Ran*, which established the SSO as one of Japan's leading orchestras. Kazuyoshi Akiyama assumed the position of Principal Conductor from 1988 to 1998 and built an impressively extensive repertoire. The current Music Director, Tadaaki Otaka, served as Resident Conductor from 1981-86 and was appointed Principal Conductor in 1998. He has been in the position of the second Music Director since 2004. Resident Conductor Ken Takaseki was designated Associate Conductor from 1988 to 1992 and was inaugurated as Resident Conductor in 2003. In 2008 Radomil Eliska was appointed the first Principal Guest Conductor of the Sapporo Symphony Orchestra.

With Otaka the orchestra gave highly acclaimed performances in the UK in 2001 and in Korea in 2005 and was praised for its distinctively clear sound and dynamic powers of expression. The orchestra began performing two subscription concerts for each program in 2005 and has since increased the number of its audience by over 10,000 people, resulting in a succession of sold-out concerts. With Otaka at the helm, the SSO have recorded to great acclaim Grieg's *Peer Gynt* and Sibelius' *Finlandia*, Dvorak's *Symphonies No 8 and No 9* and Elgar's *Symphony No 3 and March No 6*. Currently the orchestra comprises 76 musicians and performs over 120 concerts every year. [www.sso.or.jp/sso\\_e/](http://www.sso.or.jp/sso_e/)

## **AKIKO SUWANAI** violin

The youngest ever winner of the International Tchaikovsky Competition, Akiko Suwanai enjoys a prestigious international career performing in concert and recital in the major cities of Europe, North America and Asia. Recent and upcoming highlights include tours with the London Symphony Orchestra (under Valery Gergiev), Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra (under Sakari Oramo), and the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse (under Tugan Sokhiev). In spring 2009 Suwanai was invited to open the Shanghai Spring International Music Festival as the first Japanese violinist to do so. The event was televised nationally and resulted in a subsequent invitation to perform at the Expo 2010 Shanghai. She recently gave the world premiere of Peter Eötvös's composition *Seven* at the Lucerne Festival with the Lucerne Festival Academy Orchestra under the baton of Pierre Boulez. Further performances with Eötvös himself conducting included concerts in Gothenburg, Budapest, Berlin, Tokyo and at the 2008 BBC Proms. Akiko also collaborates with renowned conductors such as Lorin Maazel, Zubin Mehta and Seiji Ozawa.

Akiko Suwanai's extensive discography with Universal Music has garnered much critical acclaim. Her releases to date include CDs with the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields under Neville Marriner, the Philharmonia Orchestra under Charles Dutoit and with the Budapest Festival Orchestra under Iván Fischer. Her numerous prizes include the International Paganini Competition, Japan Competition and Queen Elisabeth International Competition. She studied at the Toho Gakuen School of Music with Toshiya Eto, at Columbia University and the Juilliard School of Music with Dorothy DeLay and Cho-Liang Lin, and also at the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin with Uwe-Martin Haiberg. She now lives in Paris.

Akiko Suwanai performs on the Antonio Stradivarius 1714 violin 'Dolphin', one of the most famous violins known today and previously owned by the celebrated violinist Jascha Heifetz. This is kindly loaned by the Nippon Music Foundation.

[www.akikosuwanai.com](http://www.akikosuwanai.com)

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