

## Ryoko Aoki, Noh-singer/-performer

### Biography

Ryoko Aoki holds a unique position in the field of Noh theatre as a female singer and performer. She has performed in several traditional Noh plays, historically the reserve of male actors. Above all, she is the pioneer of and inspiration for a new artistic form combining utai – traditional Noh recitation – with contemporary music. Nearly 60 works have been written for her by various composers including Peter Eötvös, Toshio Hosokawa, Stefano Gervasoni, José María Sánchez-Verdú, and Oliver Schneller.

She has performed with ensembles and orchestras including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Orchestra of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, the Spanish National Orchestra and Choir (OCNE), the Ensemble intercontemporain, the Ensemble Musikfabrik, the Remix Ensemble, the Munich Chamber Orchestra, the Arditti Quartet, the Quatour Diotima, and the Hiroshima Symphony Orchestra.

In the 2025/26 season, Ryoko Aoki will once again be involved in a wide range of projects: In November, the musical theater piece *Otemba*, composed especially for her by the Japanese composer Misato Mochizuki, will be performed again in Utrecht, Breda, Rotterdam, and The Hague, following its successful premiere at the Holland Festival in the summer, directed by Jan van den Berg. Prior to that, Ryoko Aoki will kick off the new season with a world premiere: she will make her debut with the Nagoya Philharmonic Orchestra in Noriko Koide's new composition *Junction*. The music theater piece *Secret Flowers – Contemporary Variations on Nō Theatre* for Noh performer, actress, string quartet, and percussion, with music by Toshio Hosokawa, Noriko Baba and a new composition by Juha T. Koskinen, will premiere in April 2026 at the Tampere Biennale contemporary music festival, directed by Aleksis Barrière.

In 2013, Ryoko Aoki made her debut at the Teatro Real de Madrid in Wolfgang Rihm's opera *The Conquest of Mexico* in the role of Malinche, in a production directed by Pierre Audi. The world premiere of Noriko Baba's "Nopera" *AOI* with the Ensemble 2e2m in Paris in 2016 was followed by world premieres of two works composed for her in the 2017/18 season: Federico Gardella's *Two Souls* at the Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and Toshio Hosokawa's *Futari Shizuka (The Maiden from the Sea)* with the Ensemble intercontemporain at the Philharmonie de Paris and Kölner Philharmonie. The work was then performed at the University of Toronto, the TTIMF Festival in Tongyeong/Korea, the Talea Ensemble in New York and the Suntory Hall Summer Festival 2021 with the Ensemble intercontemporain. In 2019, she performed Peter Eötvös' *Secret kiss*, premiered by the Gageego Ensemble, at Konserthus Göteborg, followed by performances at Tokyo Bunka Kaikan, Casa da Música Porto with Remix Ensemble and Auditorio Nacional Madrid with Plural Ensemble as well as with the Ensemble Musikfabrik at the Berlin Philharmonie and in Cologne and Budapest. Furthermore, in 2022 she premiered José María Sánchez-Verdú's *Hazia la Luz* with the Spanish National Orchestra and Choir (OCNE) at the Auditorio Nacional Madrid. Last season, Ryoko Aoki appeared at the Concertgebouw Amsterdam in Arnold Schoenberg's *Pelleas and Melisande* in a production directed by Pierre Audi. Noriko Baba's *Nopera AOI* was performed for the first time in Lausanne, where Ryoko Aoki also led a masterclass. The Spanish premiere of Toshio Hosokawa's *Futari Shizuka* took place at the Palau de la Música de València

As part of her NohxContemporary Music project, Ryoko Aoki has commissioned a series of new works for Noh voice. A recording of some of these compositions, including Peter Eötvös' *Harakiri*, was released in 2014. During Covid-19 pandemic, she broadcasted the online concert *HO NOH – Pray for an end to the Covid-19* as a live-streaming remote session on her YouTube Channel. In 2021, she released the recording *Yoru no Kotoba* with the cellist of Ensemble intercontemporain, Éric-Maria Couturier, which was created in a real-time remote recording session between Tokyo and Paris. In 2025, a CD of Toshio Hosokawa's *Futari Shizuka*, recorded with the Residentie Orkest The Hague conducted by Jun Märkl, was released by Naxos.

Ryoko Aoki obtained a BA and a Master of Music from the Faculty of Music at the Tokyo National University of Fine Art and Music with a focus on the Kanze school of Noh theatre, before gaining a Ph.D. from the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, with a thesis on "Women and Noh". She was appointed "Japan Cultural Envoy" by the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japanese government in 2015 and was awarded "The Creative Tradition Prize" by the Japan Arts Foundation in 2019.

2025/26 season

**This biography is to be reproduced without any changes, omissions, or additions, unless expressly authorised by the artist management.**

Link to the artist page: <https://en.karstenwitt.com/artist/ryoko-aoki>