

Toshio Hosokawa, Composer

Biography

I am searching for a new form of Japanese spiritual culture and music, one through which I can remain true to myself as well as to my origins. We need to examine the Western world again, more carefully, in order to see ourselves objectively and to truly get to know ourselves.

Toshio Hosokawa, Japan's pre-eminent living composer, creates his distinctive musical language from the fascinating relationship between Western avant-garde art and traditional Japanese culture. His music is strongly connected to the aesthetic and spiritual roots of the Japanese arts (such as calligraphy), as well as to those of Japanese court music (such as Gagaku). He gives musical expression to notions of beauty rooted in transience: "We hear the individual notes and appreciate, at the same time, the process of how the notes are born and then die: a sound landscape of continual 'becoming' that is animated in itself."

Born in Hiroshima in 1955, Toshio Hosokawa came to Germany in 1976, where he studied composition with Isang Yun, Brian Ferneyhough, and later, Klaus Huber. Although his initial compositions drew inspiration from the Western avant-garde, he gradually built a new musical world between East and West. He first gained widespread recognition with the 2001 world premiere of his oratorio *Voiceless Voice in Hiroshima*.

Toshio Hosokawa has written numerous orchestral works in recent years, including *After the Storm* for two sopranos and orchestra on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, and *Woven Dreams*, commissioned as part of the Roche Commissions (Cleveland Orchestra, Franz Welser-Möst, Lucerne Festival 2010). *Circulating Ocean*, premiered by the Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg Festival in 2005, has also become part of the repertoire of many orchestras. Toshio Hosokawa continues to compose works that focus on nature themes, such as the horn concerto *Moment of Blossoming* for Stefan Dohr and the Berlin Philharmonic (2011). Since 2003, he has been composing a loose sequence entitled *Voyages* for solo instrument and ensemble. In some of these works he combines Japanese and European instruments, as in *Voyages X Nozarashi* for shakuhachi and ensemble. Traditional Japanese instruments such as the shō or koto also feature elsewhere in his oeuvre, which comprises some 200 compositions.

The organ concerto *Umarmung*, premiered in 2017 by Christian Schmitt and the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, was performed by the ORF Radio Symphony Orchestra Vienna at the Vienna Konzerthaus in 2018 and again at Suntory Hall in 2019. The orchestral work *Uzu*, premiered in 2019 by the Tokyo Metropolitan Orchestra, received the Otaka Prize for the best Japanese composition of the year. It was last heard in February 2024 as a Dutch premiere with the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra under Jun Märkl. In 2021, his violin concerto *Genesis* for soloist Veronika Eberle, a commission from the Hamburg Philharmonic State Orchestra, Hong Kong Sinfonietta, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Hiroshima Symphony Orchestra, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra (SOČR), and the Grafenegg Festival, was premiered in Grafenegg.

In 2022, the world premiere of *Ceremony* for flute and orchestra, played by Emmanuel Pahud with the Tonhalle Orchestra under Paavo Järvi, caused a storm of enthusiasm in Zurich. The Japanese premiere took place with the Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa under Nodoka Okisawa; the German premiere followed in February 2024 with the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra under Kent Nagano and soloist Daniela Koch. The UK premiere took place in 2024 with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Kahchun Wong, featuring violinist Sayaka Shoji. That same year, the piano quintet *Oreksis* was premiered at the Pierre Boulez Saal in Berlin on the occasion of the Arditti Quartet's 50th anniversary (a recording will soon be released on the Kairos label), followed by the world premiere of *In the Forest* with the Kammerakademie Potsdam conducted by Bas Wiegers. The current season will also see the premiere of a new solo work: cellist Michele Marco Rossi will perform the piece in November as part of the Umbria Green Festival.

The past season was marked by the work on his new opera *Natasha*, which premiered in August 2025, shortly before his 70th birthday, in a production by Christian Rätz. The performances at the New National Theatre, featuring the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Kazushi Ono, were met with great acclaim. The multilingual libretto was written by the Berlin-based Japanese author Yoko Tawada. A video recording of *Natasha*, filmed live in Tokyo, will be available for streaming on OperaVision from December 2025 to June 2026.

Many of Toshio Hosokawa's music theatre works are now part of the repertoire of major opera houses. His first opera *Vision of Lear*, which was received with great praise at the 1998 Munich Biennale, was followed in 2004 by *Hanjo*, a work staged by choreographer Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker and co-commissioned by the Brussels opera house La Monnaie and the Aix-en-Provence Festival. It has since been performed on numerous stages, most recently in 2022 as the American premiere at the Catapult Opera in New York with the Talea Ensemble and in 2023 in a further production with choreography by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui at the Bavarian State Opera. The opera *Matsukaze*, which, like *Hanjo*, is based on material from Japanese Nô theatre, will be performed there again in 2025 as part of the Ja, Mai festival in Munich. The work, which has since been performed many times, was first staged by choreographer Sasha Waltz at La Monnaie opera house in Brussels in 2011. The monodrama *The Raven* for mezzo-soprano and ensemble, premiered in Brussels in 2012, was also staged in several theatrical performances.

In quick succession, Toshio Hosokawa has presented three more operas: *Stilles Meer* debuted at the Hamburg State Opera in 2016, the one-act melodrama *Futari Shizuka (The Maiden from the Sea)* premiered in Paris in 2017 and was followed in 2018 by *Erdbeben. Träume* at Stuttgart Opera, based on a libretto by Büchner Prize winner Marcel Beyer. The musical material of the opera was used to create the four-movement orchestral suite *Erdbeben. Träume*, which was premiered in November 2022 by the Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna under Marco Angius and whose revised version was first performed by the Hamburg Symphony Orchestra under Sylvain Cambreling at the Elbphilharmonie in 2023. In 2021, the musical fairy tale *Deine Freunde aus der Ferne*, in which Toshio Hosokawa and writer Yoko Tawada take the young audience on a dream journey to distant worlds, was launched at the Philharmonie Luxembourg by the ensemble United Instruments of Lucilin and narrator Salome Kammer.

Toshio Hosokawa has been a member of the Academy of Fine Arts Berlin since 2001 and of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts since 2012. In 2006/07 and 2008/09, he was a Fellow of Berlin's Institute for Advanced Study. He has served as Composer-in-Residence with a number of renowned institutions, including the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra (2013/14), the Hiroshima Symphony Orchestra (2019 to 2021), the Grafenegg Festival (2021), the Tonhalle Zürich (as Creative Chair in 2022), and the Orquesta de Valencia (2025). Among his many awards and honours are the Japan Foundation Award (2018), the Goethe Medal (2021), the Berkeley Japan Prize (2023), and the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award (2025). He is Artistic Director of the Takefu International Music Festival and of the Suntory Hall International Programme for Music Composition.

Season 2025/26

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