

## MICHIKO OTAKI REVIEWS

### BRNO CHAMBER SOLOISTS 2005

"[Otaki's] talents could be appreciated by just seeing her sit down at the piano, full of self-confidence and delicacy. \_Her performance was impeccable, with a bright and even touch, playing with nuances of color and an undertone of feelings."

*El Nuevo Herald, Miami*

"The highlight of the program came when the dozen became a lucky 13 and a piano was added for a Mozart piano concerto with Japanese-American Michiko Otaki as soloist. She delivered a crisp and poetic reading of the less-heard Mozart K.415 (No. 13) that was right in the style of the best interpreters of these earlier concertos, like Perahia, Brendel or her compatriot Mitsuko Uchida.

Otaki's elegant touch produced a crystal clear tone from our big Steinway that suggested the more delicate instruments of Mozart's time, while lacking nothing in vigor and momentum."

*Montana Standard*

**"SUPERB JAPANESE OPENED THE FESTIVAL LANDSCAPE OF MUSIC**—The excellent pianist Michiko Otaki, who was born in Japan and now lives in USA, opened the tenth year of the Landscape of Music. In the fully booked Castle Theatre Auditorium she and the Brno Chamber Soloists received thunderous applause for their interpretation of the Concerto for piano and orchestra by W.A. Mozart."

*Vysocina 7/05*

### WARSAW WIND QUINTET: 1989-1997

"Tuesday's concert [June 1st concert of the Warsaw Wind Quintet and Michiko Otaki at the Chamber Hall of the Warsaw Philharmonic] certainly belongs to the best in Warsaw during the last couple of months"

*The Studio Magazine, Warsaw, Poland*

### **Chamber Music Festival in Rybna, Poland:**

"Ms. Otaki demonstrates all the characteristics of a born chamber musician with a highly developed aesthetic sense. She securely assumes the lead when her part calls for it or seamlessly blends into the musical texture when the work requires a tightly intergrated ensemble."

*Ruch Muzyczny*

"Fine sense of proportion and musicianship . . . a tribute to chamber playing of the highest order"

*The Washington Post*

"Brilliant and sensitive"

*Badische Zeitung, Freiburg*

"Otaki was an ideal partner at the piano through her agility and great sensitivity for sounds."

*Berner Zeitung*

"The pianist excelled through her crystal-clear and expressively nuanced performance . . . the petite pianist was startling in her very energetic and powerful playing"

*Basel Landshafliche Zeitung*

"Extra praise to the gifted pianist with a sensitivity and good interpretive sense"

*Neue Ruhr Zeitung*

"Absolute perfection as a soloist as well as an accompanist . . . interpreted her part with incredible adaptability"

*Oltner Tagblatt*

"A pianist who integrates herself with great imagination into the sonority of the wind players and yet presents her own part appropriately . . . Her supple singing quality as well as her sparkling scales were remarkable" *Der Bund, Bern*

"Otaki's piano playing fit into the texture seamlessly, a sensitive partner for the group"

*The Blade, Toledo*

"The combination of the Quintet and Otaki . . . seems to be that of musical soul-mates. She eschewed blatant parading of her considerable technical wares in favor of putting the ensemble first. The payoff was great music-making by all six"

*The Star Ledger, Newark*

"Otaki did a wonderful job of integrating her sound with the winds, matching both the clarity of the oboe and the richness of the horn with equal expertise. Throughout the concert, pianist Otaki's expert musicianship made her the *de facto* leader of the group, clearly defining the stylistic direction with conviction"

*The Tennessean, Nashville*

"Michiko Otaki played with convincing authority"

*Rheinische Post, Germany*

"She is a musical chameleon, fitting convincingly in three very different stylistic settings"

*Winston-Salem Journal*

"A fine young artist who provides the musical glue that holds the quintet together . . . blended perfectly with the wind players . . . Otaki's performance was full and complete."

*Dayton Daily News*

"Beethoven's Quintet showed Ms. Otaki's skills to advantage: velocity, accuracy and a clear idea how to make sense of the composer's ornate melodic style"

*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

"Otaki is a fine ensemble pianist. Her technique is excellent, and she blended with the Warsaw's sound admirably"  
*The Morning Call, Bethlehem*

"A performance of great beauty and deepest feelings, for which the pianist Michiko Otaki was largely responsible"  
*Rhein-Sieg-Rundschau, Germany*

"It was evident that she had an intuitive grasp of accompaniment, with every register of the piano under control"  
*Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*

"An exceptionally vivacious interpreter whose performance blended very well with the winds" *Die Glocke, Germany*

"A fine feature of the evening . . . she played with fluency, elegance, digital accuracy and a good command of Mozart style."  
*The Cleveland Plain Dealer*

"Played brilliantly [with] the fluency of fine poetry . . . she certainly exhibited all the attributes of greatness: expressive sensitivity, power, facility, and stage presence."  
*New Jersey Star Ledger*

"Enthusiastic endorsement . . . refinement and wit . . . on all interpretive accounts, Otaki and the Warsaw Quintet come out in front" [of the rival recording by Dennis Russell Davies and German wind players.]  
FANFARE

"Very high . . . a very gutsy performance and very appealing" [Eleanor Lawrence]  
"Excellent" [Edward Downes]  
FIRST HEARING [nationally syndicated radio forum]

"A very satisfying musical whole . . . "capture [Thuille's] symphonic breadth in a very fine performance."  
AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE

"Sextet presents lively sampler of chamber music: A powerhouse of a program ...performed by artists revered for their ability to create a fine, balanced sound. It was chamber music as it should be: refined, resonant and very lively."  
*The News-Journal, Daytona Beach*

"Warsaw Wind blows beautifully: Superlative evening of music-making. A remarkable level of lyrical and expressive freedom while performing together as if a single artistic mind, with a unity of sound that was truly symphonic in breadth and depth... beautifully balanced program, performed with the able aid of pianist Michiko Otaki, Beethoven's Quintet for Piano and Winds, danced, soared and sang, as did Louis Spohr's Quintet, Op. 52."  
*The Birmingham News*

"The players of the Warsaw Wind Quintet are clearly a fine lot of musicians. They were joined by a fine pianist, Michiko Otaki. But the best of all, they presented, a fine and fresh program...full of bright playing and charm."  
*Times-Picayune, New Orleans*

"Otaki had the light touch needed to make the keyboard part clear."  
*The Plain Dealer*

"Control was a hallmark of the group, and no one demonstrated that better than Ms. Otaki. With a genial appearance behind the piano, her moves were conservative, gently stroking the keys."  
*Augusta*

"Individual and ensemble playing of the highest caliber. Even the program's lesser works were beautifully played, models of flawless technique and profound mutual sympathy."  
*The Star-Ledger*

"Virtuoso chamber pianist . . . perfection in the chamber music genre. The piano played technical fast-running passages through several modulations and, at other times, provided delicate, stylistic turns and trills."

"Meet Michiko Otaki, a fantastically assured pianist, who knows how to soar with a fiery passion and technique, but who also knows how to be a supportive team-player."  
*The Oak Ridger*

#### **BRNO CHAMBER ORCHESTRA: 1996-2002**

"Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 11 in F major, K. 413, was well served by Otaki's careful and stylish playing. Use of the University's recently-restored 1923 Steinway piano aided her production of a crystalline and pure piano sound that conveyed Mozart's score without blemish. She played with the piano lid fully up, allowing for a full range of sound color. Her sensitive and light touch was well balanced by the small string ensemble, which matched her in exactness and purity."

William Thomas Walker, *Classical Voice North Carolina*

"Otaki played the pert Allegro with affectionate clarity and the Brno musicians gave her some of that mellow Bohemian warmth."

James F

"One of the finest performances of the concert season took place at the Bijou Theatre...a wonderful performance...brightly and cheerfully played by Brno's 12 string players. Then Otaki gave one of the purist classical performances of a Mozart piano concerto heard here in a long time. Her clean, precise technique...a beautiful singing quality that was carefully balanced against the texture of the Brno's sensitive accompaniment."

Harold Duckett, *The News-Sentinel, Knoxville, TN*

"Otaki played Mozart comfortably, with the requisite elegance."

Tim Thompson, *Palm Beach Daily News*

"Otaki is an immaculate technician who can doubtless spin a shapely phrase in her sleep. Ms. Otaki's scales glittered and her phrasing nuances were duplicated by all....liquid legato and well-defined accents."

Paul Somers, *Classical New Jersey*

". . . Otaki is a dynamic performer. She displayed awesome technical proficiency at the keyboard, executing this highly ornamental work [in Mozart's Concerto K.414] with passion and authority."

*The Gazette, Cedar Rapids*

"[Otaki's] playing was clean, clear and unmannered, and the music spoke with grace."

*The Plain Dealer, Cleveland*

"Otaki's assurance and her gem-like brilliance brought the cheerful outer movements and the hymnlike slow movement to vibrant life. Here was refinement without loss of spirit and rhythmic vigor without loss of elegance."

*The Indianapolis Star*

"Pianist Michiko Otaki shaped phrases with the utmost taste and subtlety. The technical demands were so easily met and so imbued with musicality that even the most Tchaikovsky-jaded listeners sat forward in full attention. So affecting was her performance that the knowledgeable audience gave her a standing ovation."

*Classical New Jersey*

"The audience was quite taken with Michiko Otaki's performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto in E-flat major, K. 446. Her crystalline phrasing and finely tuned nuances were the epitome of Mozart style . . . she was brought out for several bows."

Paul So

"Pianist Michiko Otaki, who teaches at Clayton State College in Morrow, enlivened the concert with an alert, vivacious rendition of Mozart's Piano Concerto."

Derrick Henry, *The Atlanta Journal*

"It was wonderful for my wife and myself to meet you yesterday, and hear you perform so beautifully the Mozart Concerto. It was clear, brilliant, touching, simple yet delicate—a real Mozart!"

Karel Husa, *Pulitzer Prize-winning composer*

"Michiko Otaki heightened this sublime atmosphere with her precision and virtuosity in Mozart's Concerto. She did more than convey the spirit of the music; she brought it intensely alive. Such fine tonal coloration! Such splendid dynamic accentuation! No wonder, then, that she got an ovation. Truly, a special pianist—one who ought to soar to the top of the keyboard realm. May the orchestra and Michiko Otaki continue to enrich and thrill audiences as much as they did ours."

Terry L. Ziegler, President, *Williamsport Community Concert Association*

#### **BOHEMIAN CHAMBER PHILHARMONIC, PARDUBICE: 2000**

"Otaki and Maestro Koutník proved to be excellent partners in their concept of Schumann's wonderful concerto. Otaki's playing was alert and lively with fire to burn. I found her phrasing to be probing and lyrical..."

*The News-Press, Ft. Myers*

"Precise, well-balanced and thoroughly musical. This was especially true of the Schumann concerto, which pianist Michiko Otaki brought brilliantly to life. One could tell she loves this piece, at the same time keeping herself in close touch with the composer's intentions. Otaki painted a series of beautiful landscapes for me..."

*Daytona Beach News-Journal*

"This young pianist, who has already achieved some impressive accomplishments, did a stellar job. Otaki's tone was crisp and bright, although she softened it effectively in lyrical passages."

"Excellent soloist... Michiko Otaki's complete mastery of her instrument allowed her to devote most of her efforts

to the beautiful poetic and romantic elements of this concerto without the distraction of hollow exhibitionism."

*Merrick Life, NY*

"Otaki presented the concerto with directness and focused energy. Taken at moderate speeds—again, no excesses—this was a reading of controlled tautness and dynamic nuance, especially noteworthy for the wonderfully intimate exchange between soloist and orchestra in the intermezzo."

"Commanding technique and lovely sound..."

*Press Journal, FL*

"Another grand experience of the concert was hearing Michiko Otaki play Schumann's A minor Piano Concerto. Hers is always a lyric touch, even in the most athletic passages. This is not to say that she plays too softly; but she is on a melody quest in which her ability to spin a long line is the great impetus. She played the Intermezzo with the same attitude as one of the composer's whimsical miniatures. And the finale was pure swinging joy. Otaki is always a gracious interpreter, bringing power through well-controlled arm weight rather than brute force. Her evident involvement and clear musical ideas, all resting on an impeccable technique, brought the knowledgeable audience members to their feet at the conclusion of the concerto."

*Classical New Jersey*

### **Slovak Sinfonietta of Ćilina: 1993-1997**

"That double-barreled quality you always hope for in a concert – music of substance and interest, performance with class – was gratifyingly there in the Fremont Presbyterian Church Sunday night as the Slovak Sinfonietta of Ćilina made its Sacramento debut with pianist Michiko Otaki as soloist.

As for Otaki, her performance in the Beethoven Concerto No. 2 in B-flat frequently seemed, like the work itself, a persuasive bridge between the crisp classicism of Mozart and the forceful expression of the mature Beethoven. She and Svarovsky brought out things in the music that made one think about it again, as if it were new – like the alternating phrases at the end of the slow movement, gently stated in a most affecting way. The immediate leap from there into the finale was a pleasant shock, leading to unsuspected (or perhaps forgotten) further surprises. It was a performance marked by clarity and feeling, and a rewarding thoughtfulness."

"BURNISHING BEETHOVEN'S SMALL 'JEWEL.'"

*The Record*

"Slovak Sinfonietta plays with exuberance...a premier example of a classical-sized orchestra...played with exuberance and precision...Michiko Otaki played both elegantly and with authority."

*The Fresno Bee*

"Otaki dazzled the audience by combining a difficult technical performance with flair and emotion. The playful rondo was particularly impressive."

*Record Searchlight*

"Michiko Otaki was the soloist for the Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 3. She almost wasn't.

Though Japanese born, she has been in America since 1977 and has learned among other things the joys of bagels. Unfortunately, in slicing one a few days ago, she cut the middle finger of her left hand. She wanted to bow out of the performance, but was convinced to go on if an announcement were made that she might have to stop. Well, she didn't stop. In fact she played brilliantly. She had to accommodate the bandaged finger – one could see it at times raised somewhat unnaturally above the keys but her improvised fingering, rather than distracting her, only raised her level. – Otaki played with the generosity of an experienced chamber player.

She knew when to back off, allowing others to shine while she spun a delicate web of sound behind them. Her slow movement had the fluency of fine poetry but never lost its pace through over-indulgence.

Just why Otaki is not as much a household name as some other artists is a mystery. On both the occasions I have heard her she certainly exhibited all the attributes of greatness: expressive sensitivity. Power. facility. and stage presence. She even has that extra something the public seems to require of its women – she is quite attractive. Just peeking under the lid of the question may open a frightening Pandora's Box.

At the conclusion Koutnik kissed Otaki's right hand in continental manner, then took her injured left hand and kissed it, too. The audience loved it and returned her to the stage several times."

Paul So

"This was followed by an even more restrained performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.3 in C Minor, for which Michiko Otaki was soloist. As far as Koutnik and Otaki were concerned, this concerto resides simply and unambiguously with the "classical" early Beethoven works. Their approach focused on immaculate attention to details of phrasing: and a smooth and sustained melodic flow rather than rhythmic assertiveness or bold contrast.

Both conductor and soloist were well-suited to this approach – Koutnik with his graceful yet precise gestures and Otaki with her unusually fluent technique and emphasis on elegant continuity."

Green E

"Beethoven's Piano Concerto No.3 in c minor, Opus 37 with the pianist drew three bows – one solo – and a bouquet of roses for the petite Miss Otaki. The artist is 35 and armed with a Ph.D. and power. Her work in the Rondo: Allegro was especially appreciated."

Mobile P

**SWISS WIND QUINTET: 1993-1994**

"The group was very fortunate in their choice of a pianist. Michiko Otaki is wonderfully articulate player with a refined touch and an intuitive sense of her place in an ensemble. In the Beethoven she floated in and out of the mix with great subtlety, her sound warm and dark with the bassoon one moment and sparkling with the oboe and flute the next. In the Thuille she was essential, the third movement a particular standout as she traded the sweet melody back and forth with the group." Peter Spencer,  
*TheStarLedger*

"Otaki integrated the often virtuosic keyboard part with exceptional skill."

*Savannah Morning News*

**Oltner Tagblatt, May 26, 1993**

**The SWISS WIND QUINTET and MICHIKO OTAKI in Olten —  
A Musical Delight**

It was an excellent move on the part of the Swiss Wind Quintet to add pianist Michiko Otaki in their program. Michiko Otaki, who is originally from Japan, was discovered in America as a young talented pianist, and already has impressive accomplishments to her credit. Not only does she perform in absolute perfection as a soloist as well as an accompanist, but she is also a pleasure to watch. It was a pity that she was not situated better on stage; it would have been nice to be able to see her fingers. (In Beethoven's Quintet for piano and winds, Op.16,) Michiko Otaki interpreted her part with incredible adaptability without taking anything away from the wind players.

The Sextet in B-flat major Op. 6 by Ludwig Thuille was the climax of the evening. The première in 1888 was a huge success. So was the performance in Olten. The five musicians were again joined by pianist Michiko Otaki. The virtuosity of each player and the delight with which they performed gave the audience an unforgettable listening pleasure.

The audience expressed their appreciation of this wonderful concert by long lasting applause. The musicians were presented with beautiful seasonal flowers.

Karl Schneider

**Der Bund, Bern, May 24, 1993**

**Castle concert in Spiez features the SWISS WIND QUINTET  
With Inspired Perfection**

The Swiss Wind Quintet performed the third concert of the castle chapel series.

In Beethoven's Op. 16 for winds and piano they were joined by the pianist Michiko Otaki; a pianist who integrates herself with great imagination into the sonority of the wind players and yet presents her own part appropriately. Her supple singing quality as well as her sparkling scales were remarkable.

Ludwig Thuille's once often heard works are rarely performed today. Thanks to the Swiss Wind Quintet and Michiko Otaki we heard a luscious but not overly imposing performance of his Sextet in B-flat major, op. 6 (1889). The exemplary performance clearly showed the strong as well as less convincing side of this piece.