

Kazuki Yamada announced winner of the 56th Suntory Music Award for 2024



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The Suntory Foundation for the Arts (Directors General: Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi and Shingo Torii) has announced Kazuki Yamada as the recipient of the 56th (2024) Suntory Music Award, which is presented to individuals or ensembles for notable contributions to the development of Western-style music in Japan.

▽Selection process

The first round of selections to choose candidates was held on Saturday January 11, 2025 at the conference room of the International House of Japan. The competition continued with final qualifying round on Thursday, February 27, 2025 at the conference room of the International House of Japan. After long consideration, Kazuki Yamada was chosen as the winner of the 56th (2024) Suntory Music Award, a decision that received the formal agreement of the Board of Directors of the Foundation on Monday, March 17, 2025.

▽Prize-money ¥7,000,000

▽The members of the selection committee

Seiji Choki, Atsuya Funaki, Nobuhiro Ito, Morihide Katayama, Akane Matsudaira,
Yuji Numano, Miyuki Shiraishi

▽Reason for the award

In 2009, Kazuki Yamada won first prize at the Besançon International Competition for Young Conductors, exactly 50 years after Seiji Ozawa's win. Fast forward to February 9, 2024, Yamada conducted the subscription concert of the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra at Suntory Hall. The programme, which consisted of Bartók's Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta, Takemitsu's November Steps, and Beethoven's Symphony No. 2, was clearly based on Ozawa's repertoire; if one replaced the Bartók with Hindemith's Mathis der Maler Symphony, it would be the same as the programme Ozawa conducted when he premiered November Steps with the New York Philharmonic in November 1967. First, Yamada conducted a vivid and refined Bartók. When he appeared after the interval for the Takemitsu, he addressed the audience and informed that Seiji Ozawa had passed away on February 6. The news had been embargoed until 7pm on February 9, the start time of the concert. The Takemitsu that followed was supple and moist, and the Beethoven was bold and driven. It was masterly.

As the saying goes, truth is stranger than fiction. A concert seemingly programmed as a challenge to Ozawa turned into his memorial concert. Of course, this was a coincidence. What should be considered here is Yamada's journey from 2009 to 2024. Although he had been fascinating audiences with his supreme dynamism since his youth, he tended to rely on inspiration based on natural talent. But over the years, his imagination and the scale of his music have expanded. He comes up with surprising ideas – unconventional interpretations, unexpected tonal colours, and unusual positioning of instruments. Such ideas are often spot on. Furthermore, when he really steps up a gear, it's incredible, and the explosive power is startling. Such characteristics were on display in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* and Saint-Saëns's *Symphony No.3, "Organ"* with the Monte-Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra during their visit to Japan in May 2024.

Furthermore, Yamada's work as Music Director of The Philharmonic Chorus of Tokyo is also important. As both choral conductor and orchestral conductor, he is unpretentious and creative about repertoire, and his insatiable desire to win over as many audiences as possible should be a guiding principle for the survival of classical music. With great expectations for the future, we present the Suntory Music Award.

(Morihide Katayama, Committee Member)

▽Biography

Kazuki Yamada (Conductor)

Kazuki Yamada is Music Director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO). Alongside his commitments in Birmingham, Yamada is Artistic and Music Director of Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo (OPMC). Yamada has forged a link between Monaco and Birmingham having conducted collaborative performances with the CBSO Chorus of Mendelssohn's 'Elijah' in both cities in 2019 and Orff's 'Carmina Burana' in 2023. His time under the close supervision of Seiji Ozawa served to underline the importance of what Kazuki Yamada calls his "Japanese feeling" for classical music. Born in 1979 in Kanagawa, Japan, he continues to work and performs in Japan every season with NHK Symphony Orchestra and Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra. Shortly after assuming his position in Birmingham, in summer 2023 Yamada gave a series of concerts on tour around Japan with the CBSO and in summer 2024 with OPMC. Yamada's passionate and collaborative approach to conducting means he commands a busy international diary of concerts, opera, and choral conducting. The current season begins with his return to the BBC Proms in summer 2024 with the CBSO, closely followed by his return to Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin as part of Musikfest Berlin. In 2025, he takes the CBSO on tour to Europe and on tour to Japan just one month later. Yamada also conducts the Monte Carlo Opera in a double bill celebration of Ravel with 'L'enfant et les sortilèges' and 'L'heure espagnole'. He makes debut appearances with the Berliner Philharmoniker, Filarmonica della Scala, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and San Francisco Symphony. He continues regular guesting commitments with Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Orchestre National de France, and Orchestre philharmonique du Luxembourg for a special performance of Fauré's Requiem with Tokyo Philharmonic Chorus. Yamada performs with soloists such as Emanuel Ax, Leif Ove Andsnes, Seong-Jin Cho, Isabelle Faust, Martin Helmchen, Nobuko Imai, Lucas and Arthur Jussen, Alexandre Kantorow, Evgeny Kissin, Maria João Pires, Julian Pregardien, Baiba Skride, Fazıl Say, Arabella Steinbacher, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Krystian Zimerman, and Frank Peter Zimmermann. Strongly committed to his role as an educator, Yamada appears annually as a guest artist at the Seiji Ozawa International Academy Switzerland and is strongly committed to the CBSO's outreach programme. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on international concert halls reaffirmed his belief that – in his words – "The audience is always involved

in making the music. As a conductor, I need an audience there as much as the musicians”. Yamada studied music at Tokyo University of the Arts, where he discovered a love for both Mozart and the Russian romantic repertory. He first achieved international attention upon receiving first prize in the 51st International Besançon Competition for Young Conductors in 2009. Having lived in Japan for most of his life, Kazuki Yamada now resides in Berlin.

See [here](#) for more on the Suntory Music Award

See [here](#) about the Suntory Foundation for the Arts