

Takeshi Asai: From Japanese IT specialist to prominent New York jazz pianist

Traditional yet modern; lyrical, - yet dramatic, jazz composer and pianist with strongly connected to classical music as well - Takeshi Asai - has been a unique voice on the New York jazz scene for decades. Let's take a look at his remarkable career, which has led from a mud fight (!), through the Beatles and the IT industry, to Broadway and the world's biggest stages!

What makes Takeshi Asai's music so unique and great is, above all, the multitude of sources of inspiration. He sees beauty in 12th century French troubadours, Gregorian chants, Baroque and Romantic traditions, 20th century or religious music, as well as the Beatles, Paul Simon, Irish and Japanese folk music, contemporary electronic dance music and even pop music. Equally amazing is his career path, which he decided to share in the pages of ArtPost magazine:

It started innocently enough, and there was no immediate spark between the now revered pianist and the piano: 6-year-old Takeshi, in the midst of a mud fight with his peers in the Land of the Cherry Blossom, was plucked from his carefree play to take his first ever piano lesson. As he recalls, *"Because of the unfinished mud fight - or not - I never liked piano lessons."* What prompted the young musician to hit his keys with real passion was the Beatles' *"Let It Be"* song, heard at a neighbor's house. Enchanted, he ran to the piano and ... played the famous intro by ear. Thus was born his love for music, which has never disappeared.

As a 13-year-old, Takeshi played guitar in a Beatles cover band. Jazz piano and improvisation became his passion when at the age of 16 he listened to a cassette of Keith Jarrett's *"Köln Concert"* given to him by his math teacher. As a teenager, however, he already felt a great fascination for Baroque music. The young jazz pianist's love for the music of J.S. Bach, which continues to this day, is explained by the strikingly similar structure of jazz and Bach's compositions, his improvisations and the analogy between the figured bass in Baroque music and the chord changes in jazz. Among his beloved works he lists: *"Italian Concerto"*, *"Partita"*, *"English Suite"*, *"French Suite"*, *"Goldberg Variations"* and *"WTC"*

Takeshi graduated from Doshisha University in Japan, which has trained many great jazz musicians. From there he moved on to the prestigious Stanford University, where he fell head over heels in love with the beauty of America. The extremely talented musician also studied at Harvard, but above all, he graduated with honors from America's famous Berklee College of Music, where he studied under classical piano master Ed Bedner. From his university days, Takeshi fondly remembers such names as Laszlo Gardoney (who remains a valued friend to this day), Ed Tomassi and Joaane Brackeen.

After graduating from university, the acclaimed composer and exceptional pianist, has made his professional career in the ... IT industry..., making music his passion. One day, the boss of an Artist (and a great IT guy!), after hearing his concert in Manhattan, barged into the office, impressed with Takeshi's playing technique and skills, convincing him to devote himself completely to music! A few weeks later, finishing work at 1am, Takeshi heard an inner voice telling him to do exactly that. It was one of the biggest decisions of his life - throwing away a career in an elite company and deciding to become a full-time musician. Then, as he recalls, *"the real hell began..."*. Today's piano virtuoso admits that his playing skills were far from professional at the time. At the age of 40, he again decided to take classical piano lessons from his former pupil Franz Liszt. Learning at a late age and having small – as for a pianist - hands were not his allies in this enormous challenge. According to his teacher's instructions, Takeshi therefore had to practice three times as much as the others. And so he did...

Although the Japanese pianist's career history is far from that of a musician conquering the world's

jazz stages, Takeshi is recognized by international critics and audiences as an exceptional, versatile virtuoso pianist with a phenomenal playing technique. He has performed in numerous jazz clubs, on stages in New York, Pennsylvania, Boston, New Hampshire, Washington DC, Wisconsin, Chicago and California. He has also toured extensively, performing in France, London, Australia, Egypt, Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. As an artist, he is also involved in film and theater music (including - Broadway productions), which is reflected in his colorful, deeply illustrative approach to music. His compositions are also a tribute to the power and beauty of classical music with fantastic poetry woven between the notes. Already at a young age, the artist discovered his relative hearing, which is why he still perceives music not through the prism of genre, but through the beauty of harmony and chord changes.

The pianist is an avid teacher (Education Partner of Steinway& Sons) and sound engineer. He has maintained a professional studio in New York City for many years. His 10th solo album was recently released, where we can admire him as an excellent composer and pianist, but also as a multi-instrumentalist and electronic music creator! The album was created during the outbreak of the pandemic, when Takeshi suffered a great loss - his friend, the eminent French double bassist Marc Peillon, passed away. It was for him that the pianist composed a three-part requiem, which is the axis of the album "The Electric Project, Vol. 2". The inside cover includes a description of the story and a dedication to his late friend, ending with the words: "*Mr. Peillo, I wrote the Requiem for you. Your gentle smile and caring heart will always be remembered.*"