Maria João Pires wins Praemium Imperiale Award

Martin Cullingford, Editor
Tuesday, September 10, 2024

Portuguese pianist joins recipients in architecture, painting, theatre, film and sculpture in receiving the honour from the Japan Art Association

Maria João Pires, photographed at the music hall in Belgais Center for Arts, eastern Portugal (photo: Shun Kambe / The Japan Art Association)

This year's Praemium Imperiale Award for Music has been given to the Portuguese pianist Maria João Pires. The award - worth 15 million Yen (c. £73,000) – is given every year by the Japan Art Association, under the honorary patronage of HIH Prince Hitachi, younger brother of the Emperor Emeritus of Japan. Along with awards for architecture, painting, theatre, film and sculpture, the prizes recognise excellence in areas of achievement not covered by the Nobel Prizes.

Pires joins an illustrious list of previous music recipients, including Anne-Sophie Mutter, Riccardo Muti, Arvo Pärt, Mitsuko Uchida, Martha Argerich, Yo-Yo Ma, Krystian Zimerman and last year's recipient, Winton Marsalis.

In a video to accompany the announcement Pires reflected on a key aspect of musical creativity, imagination: 'We all have imagination, but many people are afraid of imagination because imagination also means change. We change every minute, every hour, every day. Our life is change. But we are afraid of change. And this fear keeps our imagination a little bit as a prisoner – like in prison. We have it but we don't develop. We don't allow ourselves to break. And it's not only breaking the rules because breaking the rules is sometimes bad for

others – so it's not good for us either. Breaking the rules is not something 100 per cent positive – it can be even very negative if it damages other people. But imagination, if it doesn't damage anybody is always 100 per cent positive because with imagination you find a real life, you find real source of inspiration. You find the real source of love - in the real sense.'

This year's other recipients are: Shigeru Ban (architecture), Sophie Calle (painting), Ang Lee (theatre and film) and Doris Salcedo (sculpture).

The Awards were announced by Lord Patten, Praemium Imperiale's International Advisor in the UK, who said: 'All five Laureates of the 2024 Praemium Imperiale awards have taken their land and people as inspiration to create works of profound poetry and impact.'

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