



# LOOKING BACK

## Pianist Noriko Ogawa remembers her winning night at the Leeds in 1987

**WFIMC:** *What memories do you have of 1987?*

**Noriko Ogawa:** Very good memories yes! I was so excited to play for the audience in Leeds! That's all I enjoyed, really. I passed the first round, I passed the second round, and I passed the semifinals, and then I thought my goodness! I am in the finals! And then I so much enjoyed it, the whole thing.

**WFIMC:** *When you sit here in the hall today, thirty years later, do you still feel the same excitement?*

**Noriko Ogawa:** Yes, yes, that's because the venue looks the same! It has not changed very much.

**WFIMC:** *This year, it's the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and Andrew Manze performing. Who was on stage with you back in 1987? Do you remember?*

**Noriko Ogawa:** How could I not remember! It was the CBSO and Simon Rattle. It was of course long before his Berlin Philharmonic days, but back then he did conduct at the Leeds. I remember when he came to the dressing room to pick me up for the performance, he was so warm and friendly.

**WFIMC:** *Were you studying in London at the time? How did you get here in the first place?*

**Noriko Ogawa:** Well, I was a junior student at Juilliard, and I was a very difficult, frustrated student back then. And rather cynical, because I would go to competitions and I would always do okay but never really, really well. Then, a friend of mine said: „Why don't you play for Benjamin Kaplan, who is visiting New York?“ I went along to

the flat where he was staying and played for him, and I have to say it was musical love at first sight. I knew I had found somebody I was looking for. Later he found me a scholarship in London and I came here absolutely penniless. But I had lessons as many times as I wanted, and suddenly, after the Leeds in 1987, all the doors opened.

**WFIMC:** *We say concert halls have a certain atmosphere, a smell, of course a certain sound... that is really the same for you?*

**Noriko Ogawa:** I think so, yes. And then of course it's the Leeds Competition. It has a world class reputation, but it is a very friendly competition behind the scenes. I think that is still there now, and I can feel it from every competitor. That makes it very special, and I think that's why I did well here.



Noriko Ogawa at Leeds Town Hall in September 2021