



Still bright and still beautiful, Muroi Mayako is 101 years old.

At 101 years old, Muroi Mayako is as sharp and spirited as many people decades younger than her. The centenarian pianist has had a long professional career spanning the globe, and continues to play to this day. Her secret? Balancing wisdom learned from different culture, not overdoing it, and maintaining a good diet.

Muroi was born in Tokyo in 1921 and grew up in the residential area of Seijo, a quiet area west of the center of the city. She says that the atmosphere of her community greatly helped her development as a musician. She looks back on her school days fondly, noting the disci-

plined but friendly environment at the liberal school she attended. Her piano journey started at six years old, when she was gifted a piano by her father. Her mother was keen to further her music education, and by the age of 10, Muroi was training with a tutor from what is now the Tokyo University of the Arts. In 1938, she entered that same school. Although it was during wartime, she was requested by the national government to teach classical music to students who were mobilized to work, and her involvement with music has never ceased.

In 1945, she debuted as a soloist in Japan, soon becoming very successful. Something was missing,

Playing for the Present

101-year-old pianist Muroi Mayako matches her classical skills with a lust for life.

by Kirsty Bowers

however; although her career was progressing, she felt she needed to go abroad to improve her skills. In 1956, at the age of 34, she was invited to represent Japan at the Mozart bicentenary celebrations in Vienna, Austria, where she gave a speech. This led her to being chosen for a special scholarship by the German government, and she spent several years studying in Berlin. Living in Europe, the home of classical music, was a life-changing experience for her, as it strengthened her confidence and affirmed her life views. "I've always been quite strong-minded and opinionated," she says. "Going to Europe reaffirmed that, as the students there were allowed to express their own will and opinions quite freely."

After returning to Japan in 1980, she has continued to hold concerts and recitals for decades now. "I feel as if I only really started to understand Beethoven's 'Für Elise' after I turned 50. It feels as if I'm having a conversation with the great composer through the score. Playing the piano allows me to understand further the narrative presented by the composer, and I make new discoveries every time I play." At her centenary special concert held in 2021, the moving approval she received from the audience on this memorable day gave her great joy and emboldened her to continue playing the piano.

To do so for such a long time requires serious stamina. Indeed, Muroi's life philosophy revolves around keeping fit through a simple diet of meat and seasonal produce, a routine she picked up in Germany. "You can't play well if you haven't eaten well," she laughs. Besides this, she enjoys walking and caring for flow-

ers in her garden, and is mindful to not wear herself out with anything. This has clearly paid off, as it has given her the energy that has enabled her not only to perform professionally, but also to find the time to write over 100 articles for a monthly piano magazine as a regular columnist for eight years, as well as author several books.



Muroi has performed in 13 countries abroad and her performances have received worldwide acclaim.

Ultimately, Muroi is very content with her life in Tokyo at present and is very happy with her life as a pianist having been able to deliver the magical music of Beethoven and Mozart for a long time. She is not pining for the past at all. "I'm actually happier now, and accept myself as I am." We can all hope to grow older in such a way.