

## SPECIAL FEATURE on ASIER POLO

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Birth: 15th September 1971 - Bilbao

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Asier Polo studied in Bilbao, Madrid, Cologne and Basel with Elisa Pascu, Maria Kliegel and Ivan Monighetti, and also received guidance from János Starker, Natalia Gutman and Mstislav Rostropovich in various masterclasses. He soon stood out as a promising young musician, winning the first prizes in Cello and Chamber Music at the National Young Musicians Competition in Spain.

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Asier Polo has been awarded numerous prizes, and amongst others, the Ojo Crítico by Radio Nacional de España (2002), the Fundación CEOE Prize for Musical Interpretation (2004) and the National Music Award by the Ministry for Culture and Sports of Spain (2019). In 2009 he was appointed “Ilustre de Bilbao” (Bilbao being his native city).

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Considered by the specialist music press as one of the most important cellists of his generation, Asier Polo has worked with many of the major international orchestras, such as the Philharmonia Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI, Dresdner Philharmonie, Orchestre de Paris, BBC Philharmonic, Bergen Filharmoniske Orkester, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Berliner Symphoniker, Orquesta Nacional de México, Orquestra Sinfônica de São Paulo, Louisiana Philharmonic, Orquesta Nacional de España and Basel Symphony Orchestra, under the baton of distinguished conductors such as John Axelrod, Pinchas Steinberg, Christian Badea, Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, Claus Peter Flor, Carlos Miguel Prieto, Günther Herbig, Juanjo Mena, Antoni Wit and Anne Manson.

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He is a regular guest at prestigious festivals, such as those held in Schleswig-Holstein, Nantes, Ohrid, Biennale di Venezia, Rome, Lisbon, Gstaad Menuhin Festival, Morelia, Granada and the Quincena Musical in San Sebastián.

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He has appeared with great artists such as Silvia Marcovici, Nicolás Chumachenco, Sol Gabetta, Maxim Rysanov, Isabelle van Keulen, Josep Colom, Eldar Nebolsin, Gerard Caussé, Cuarteto Janáček, Cuarteto Casals and Alfredo Kraus, who in the last years of his career invited him to perform as soloist at his concerts, with engagements at the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in London, Tonhalle in Zurich and the prestigious Musikverein in Vienna, as well as a successful tour in the major concert halls in Japan.

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He is devoted to contemporary music, especially from his native country. Composers such as Gabriel Erkoreka, Jesús Torres, Luis de Pablo, Jesús Villa-Rojo, Fernando Velázquez and Antón García Abril have all dedicated their cello concertos to Asier Polo. He enjoys combining modern music with the great classical repertoire, covering everything from Bach's Suites, classical and romantic concertos, to contemporary music such as Henri Dutilleux, Cristóbal Halffter and Sofia Gubaidulina.

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He has recorded 18 albums for major record labels such as Naxos, Claves, RTVE, IBS Classical and Marco Polo, playing some of the major Spanish repertoire for cello, such as the concertos by José María Usandizaga, Joaquín Rodrigo, Francisco Escudero, Tomás Marco, Carmelo Bernaola and Jesús Rueda. Highlights include the nomination for the Gramophone Editor's Choice Award CD dedicated to the work of the composer Sofia Gubaidulina (Et'cetera Records) and the recording of the *Ecos y Sombras* [Echoes and Shades] DVD dedicated to Cristóbal Halffter, performing his Cello Concerto no. 2 with the Spanish National Orchestra (Koala KPA 111).

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His latest CD releases include Rachmaninov and César Franck's sonatas for cello and piano with Marta Zabaleta and Brahms' cello sonatas with the pianist Eldar Nebolsin, as well as Vivaldi, Boccherini and Haydn's cello concertos together with the Orquesta Barroca de Sevilla and Andrés Gabetta.

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Two new albums will soon be released with the Spanish National Orchestra, conducted by Juanjo Mena: Joaquín Rodrigo's two cello concertos - *Concierto como un Divertimento* and *Concierto in modo Galante*-, as well as Alberto Ginastera's Cello Concerto no.2, Op.50 (1980).

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He is regularly invited to be on the judging panel of international cello competitions, such as the Dotzauer Wettbewerb (Germany), Carlos Prieto International Cello Competition (Mexico), Benedetto Mazzacurati Competition (Italy) and the Manhattan International Music Competition (New York). He also gives masterclasses in many countries, including Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Mexico, Venezuela and Brazil.

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Asier Polo plays a Francesco Ruggeri cello (Cremona, 1689) purchased in collaboration with the Fundación Banco Santander.

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Anecdote: the second photo is of my colleague and friend Asier playing recently as soloist with the Navarra Symphony Orchestra: so I'm that front desk cellist by conductor losing a bit of hair on top, gasp, horror!!!

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‘documenting the cello’

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