

**8:00 PM PST - June 21 & 25, 2022**

**WAVEFORMS**

**[www.pianospheres.org/watch](http://www.pianospheres.org/watch)**

**Takashi Harada – ondes Martenot**

**Mark Robson – piano**

**Kojiro Umezaki - shakuhachi**

**Program**

Harada, Robson, Umezaki

**Improvisation #1**

ondes, piano, shakuhachi

Shin'ichirō Ikebe

**Thermal Conductivity**

solo ondes

Olivier Messiaen

**Feuillets inédits**

I. II. III. IV

ondes, piano

Harada, Robson

**Improvisation #2**

ondes, piano

Mark Robson

(Electronic Realization by  
Hunter Ochs)

**Komorebi (world premiere)**

ondes, electronic track

Harada, Umezaki

**Improvisation #3**

ondes, shakuhachi

Harada, Robson, Umezaki

**Improvisation #4**

ondes, piano, shakuhachi

Takashi Harada

**Let's Give Peace a Chance**

solo ondes, voice

## WAVEFORMS—notes

Waves—the fluctuations of water, light and sound; and sometimes, the recurring events or themes of a life. Our program, “Waveforms,” embodies this definition in our presentation of the ondes Martenot for our final program in the 2021/22 Piano Spheres season. The French word *onde* means ‘wave’, and cellist/inventor Maurice Martenot tapped into the potential of sound waves to create his unique keyboard instrument, whose centenary approaches in 2028. The phenomenon of the ondes remains a mystery to many, but we hope to initiate or further illumine our audience to the beauties and intricacies of this versatile instrument.

Guest performer Takashi Harada shares his artistry as an *ondiste*, providing a program whose repertoire covers a wide gamut of ondes Martenot expression. He’s assisted at the piano by the author of these notes and by shakuhachi player Kojiro Umezaki. Through the waves of technology plus the crisscrossing waves of friendship and shared experience, we offer two classics of the repertoire, two premieres and a few short improvisations. The latter, sprinkled throughout the program, were accomplished through the magic of Zoom and low latency ‘telematic’ technology allowing Tokyo and Irvine, CA to connect with only the most minimal time lag; all three artists had never played with one another before, but the vibes were right no matter the distance between us. Exigencies due to the Covid crisis pre-empted a live performance on the date originally listed for our concert, so we have handily refashioned the presentation into a video format. The following are notes about the composed works in the order they appear.

**Shin’ichirō Ikebe** is known for his prolific output in a variety of genres, which include symphonic works, concerti, chamber music and film scores. He has composed for such directors as Akira Kurosawa and Akio Jissoji, who made use of the piece **Thermal Conductivity** in his movie *D-Zaka no satsujin jiken* (“The D-Slope Murder Case”). Ikebe originally composed the music in 1995 as a concert piece dedicated to Takashi Harada. In 1998, Jissoji made use of it by freely cutting up and splicing parts of the recorded score to accompany specific scenes (typical of his process, which involved drawing from pieces he himself commissioned or adapting those of pre-established classical composers). In the case of *D-Zaka* he also made use of a new composition for ondes and viola by Ikebe.

The piece begins with the highest note of the instrument and continues through the entire range to the lowest note, with free glissandos, legato and staccato techniques played with various nuances and timbral inflections. It is an exacting solo with a wide range of dynamics, from the barely audible micro-pianissimo to a body-shaking fortissimo, the instrument's greatest feature and charm. Ikebe’s expressive scope is studded with meticulous and delicate calligraphy; his work has remained an important and frequently performed staple the ondes Martenot solo repertoire.

We have Yvonne Loriod to thank for bringing to light the **Feuillets inédits**, undated miniatures culled from her husband Olivier Messiaen’s manuscripts after his death in 1992. In fact, she arranged them for ondes and piano with an insider’s knowledge of the style suggested by the material since

the composer did not indicate any specifics about the instrumentation (he had only designated them as 'déchiffrage', or sight reading, which suggests they may have been intended for eventual conservatory examinations). Loriod intervened twice further by adding birdsong to the proceedings: first, by appending a brief, lively postlude to the end of the second piece which was taken from a birdsong transcribed by Messiaen on April 29, 1987, and then by adding birdsong material to the main thematic premise of the third piece. There, she creates a dialogue between the ondes and piano using songs of the Garden and Blackheaded Warblers. Loriod had come upon manuscript entries from July of 1988 that were two days apart in which the distinct songs were notated; she cheerily deduced that since the birds had likely heard one another's singing, she could create a duet for them. One is tempted to see an autobiographical manipulation here that allowed Loriod to symbolically warble with her own sister, renowned ondiste Jeanne Loriod. This makes sense given that the destinies of the sisters and Messiaen had long been intertwined. No matter the editorial presumptions, the music navigates fluently between the Messiaen of his earliest manner of the 1930s (the first and last movements) and the birdsong style that could easily have been used in his 1983 opera *St. François d'Assise* (the second and third movements). The suite was published by Éditions Durand in 2001.

**Komorebi** came into being as a response to the nuanced meaning of the Japanese word itself, which is translated as 'the sunlight that filters through the leaves of trees'—an eminently evocative definition that includes mood, place and a state of mind. From here I began to ponder how to render the idea of emergent sound as a metaphor for the perception of intermittent light, as well as the feeling of being in nature and allowing one's mind to roam freely. The ondes Martenot represents this airborne consciousness amidst a 'landscape' provided by the electronic track. Because of the naturally disembodied sounds inherent in the instrument, it seemed to be perfectly companionable with those of electronic processing and synthesis.

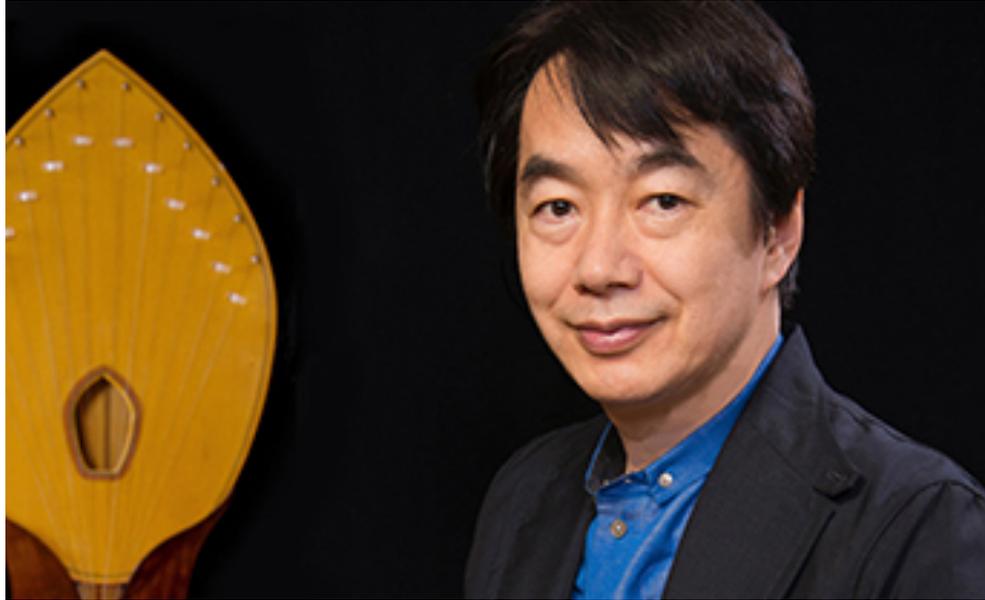
The piece is conceived as a sort of ritual placed outdoors, where the chief natural protagonist is the 'uguisu' or Japanese bush warbler. Its song, a harbinger of the spring season, is comprised of three elements: an initial tone with a rapid crescendo, a couple of brief accented melodic 'flips' and then an oscillation of tones uttered in a progressively slowing tempo. The sampling of an actual uguisu song permitted for manipulations that include changing the speed and register of the melody, electronic processing of various overtone components of the birdsong segments or the simple presentation of the song as it's heard in nature. Other contributors to the collage of sounds are wind, a sampled glass lampshade, a sheep's hooves rattle, synth versions of harp, strings and horns, and a sample of the shō, a mouth organ employed to accompany *noh* plays. The shō makes use of distinctive cluster chords that underpin *noh* recitations, and I've utilized 6 of them plus two original chords to demarcate the 8 basic tonal regions of the piece. There is a parenthesis of sorts in the middle section in which the ondes is in a more deliberate counterpoint with the wandering line of shifting electronic tones, which acts like a mist passing over the proceedings. The ondes subsequently takes its turn at imitating the bird when the harp returns, and the final word is given to the bells and pseudo-wind. (This piece, dedicated with admiration to Takashi Harada, would not have been possible without the talents of Hunter Ochs, who realized the sound design of the electronic track.)

The program concludes with a solo piece by Takashi Harada, whose musical expertise embraces not only the classical repertoire for ondes Martenot but the diverse realms of improvisation, popular music and even the craft of the *chansonnier*. He provides this description:

**Let's Give Peace a Chance** is rooted in two musical influences that had a profound impact on me as a teenager. One was Pablo Casals' 1971 speech at the United Nations headquarters and his performance of the traditional Catalan Christmas song "The Song of the Birds". The other is a line from the French singer/poet Barbara's 1972 chanson "Perlimpinpin," which asks those peddle violence why they must be against people, things and ideas: *If I absolutely have to be against someone or something, I am for the setting sun above deserted hills, I'm for deep forests, because the child that cries--be it anywhere--is a child that cries, and the child that dies at the end of your gun is a child that dies. How appalling to have to choose between two kinds of innocence!* My piece is based on something I wrote in 2013 for my participation in the "Renga-Song Relay/Tori no Uta--El Cant dels Ocells" produced by composer Akira Inoue (son of Japanese cellist Yoritoyo Inoue), who was trained by Casals. I reworked it as a solo work in 2017 and then re-arranged it for this recording. The birds, which had been singing and flying freely, are soon lost in a world of confusion and darkness and are forced to stop their wings because of the footsteps and gunshots of men playing at being soldiers. The dawn will soon come, and those of us who live just barely hanging on cannot afford to forget the song of hope. The appearance of a militaristic rhythmic drone halfway through the piece alludes to Barbara's song, and "El cant dels ocells" is invoked as a deep melodic solo over which I sing my own short poem of hope and peace.

Notes compiled, edited and written by Mark Robson—June 2022

Piano Spheres wishes to thank The Japan Foundation, the UC Irvine Contemporary Arts Center Recording Studio and the Gassmann Electronic Music Studios for their generous support.

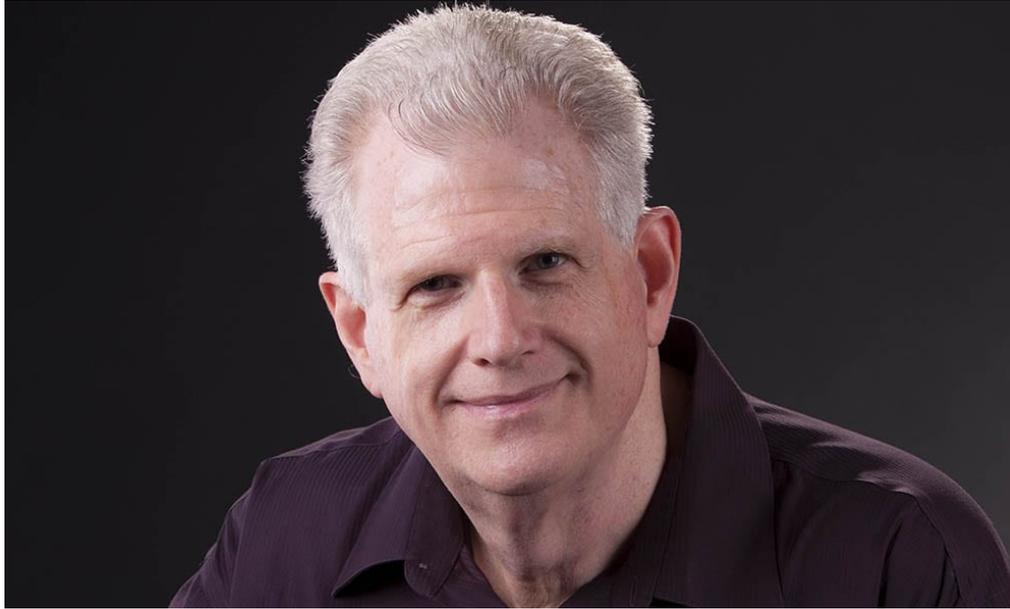


**Takashi Harada:** ondes Martenot - The first Japanese musician ever to play the ondes Martenot as a solo instrument, Takashi Harada performs extensively as a soloist. In addition, he established the first ondes Martenot school in Asia in 2001, and with his development of an instrumental vocabulary and expansion of the repertoire for the ondes Martenot, Harada has been very actively involved in the cultivation of the next generation of ondistes.

In the field of contemporary music, Harada is in the creative forefront. With the richness of his widely varied works, including music for movies, TV, animation and games, he has firmly established his standing as a composer. He has received numerous awards including the Idemitsu Music Prize, the Yokohama Culture Award, and the Music PEN Club Award.

Messiaen's Turangalila-symphonie is one of the most famous, and the most frequently performed, work featuring the ondes Martenot as a central instrument. In 2008, the Messiaen anniversary year, Harada performed Turangalila-symphonie with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Kyushu Symphony Orchestra, PMF Orchestra, Orchestra of the Opera National de Lyon, and Boston Symphony Orchestra. To date he has performed the work over 330 times in 20 countries.

Harada composed the music for the latest (2012) edition of the original video animation One Off, directed by Junichi Sato.



**Mark Robson** has been hailed by the Los Angeles Times as a pianist with “one of the great techniques,” “an inquiring mind” and a performer capable of evoking an “exquisite engulfing pastel haze,” and he continues to impress with his multi-faceted career as a soloist, chamber musician, and teacher.

Mr. Robson is equally comfortable in styles ranging from early music played on the harpsichord and organ to the great Romantic repertoire and beyond to contemporary piano works demanding theatrical participation from the performer. As a collaborative artist with singers and instrumentalists, he commands the respect of his peers in both the recital and chamber settings. He presents an annual recital for the LA series *Piano Spheres* and has performed for *Jacaranda* on numerous occasions. As an organist, he has also appeared as a soloist in the Minimalist Jukebox at Disney Hall and has performed on the organ in Mahler’s 8th Symphony at the Hollywood Bowl in their 2008 season.

After completing conservatory and university training, Mr. Robson amplified his musical studies with extensive study in Paris-where he was a pupil of Yvonne Loriod, widow of composer Olivier Messiaen-and through his work as an assistant conductor and assistant chorus master for the Los Angeles Opera. During this time he worked with renowned international singers and conductors, gaining great insight into the lyric art. He has also been a musical assistant at the Salzburg and Spoleto (Italy) festivals. As a composer, Robson has been programmed on concerts in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Barcelona and Paris. The Brentwood-Westwood Symphony Orchestra has premiered two of his orchestral works, *Apollo Rising* and *Christmas Suite*. Soprano Patricia Prunty has recorded his song cycle *A Child of Air* and the same piece was presented by Sari Gruber at the winter Ravinia Festival.

The recipient of several scholarships and awards (including the Certificate of Excellence from the Corvina Cultural Circle for artistic contributions to Hungary), Mark Robson has received

degrees from the University of Southern California and Oberlin College. He has worked as a vocal coach for the faculties of USC, Chapman University, the California Institute of the Arts and Cal State Fullerton. Among his formidable musical projects has been the performance in eight concerts of the complete piano sonatas of Beethoven and numerous performances of Messiaen's massive cycle, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*.



**Kojiro Umezaki:** Shakuhachi, Composer

Noted by The New York Times as a "virtuosic, deeply expressive shakuhachi player and composer" and the LA Times as one of the "better kept secrets of Southern California music," [Kojiro Umezaki \(梅崎康二郎\)](#) has performed regularly with the Silkroad Ensemble since 2001. He appears on the Grammy Award winning album *Sing Me Home, A Playlist Without Borders*, *Off the Map*, and the Grammy-nominated 2015 documentary film, *The Music of Strangers*, directed by Morgan Neville. In a Circle Records released (*Cycles*), an album of original work, in 2014, and *流芳 Flow*, a duo album with Wu Man, in 2021. Other notable recordings as performer, composer, and/or producer include Brooklyn Rider's *Dominant Curve*, Nicole Mitchell's *Mandorla Awakening II*, Kei Akagi's *Aqua Puzzle*, and Huun Huur Tu's *Ancestors Call*. Born to a Japanese father and Danish mother, Umezaki grew up in Tokyo, and continues to explore global and hybrid practices in music.