

# Acropolis Cinema and the Yanai Initiative present:

Ishibashi sits behind a grand piano and a laptop, switching from piano to flute to laptop and back again, triggering passages of dialogue from the film, activating shimmering drones and digital delay pedals. On “Drive My Car (Hiroshima),” she plays an eight-bar piano riff—with an insistent right-hand arpeggio and a left-hand bass line—and puts it through a loop pedal, which allows her to play flute over the top, engaging in tight, slightly discordant harmonies with Matsumaru. Elsewhere she triggers a sample of herself playing a big-swinging drum pattern using brushes—similar to the one used on the film track “We’ll Live Through the Long Long Days”—and plays a slow, tangle of chords on the piano while Matsumaru improvises, delicately.

At just under an hour, the concert leaves you wanting a little more. The encore—a duet for piano and alto sax which sounds like a ballad from the short-lived mid-70s collaboration between Keith Jarrett and Jan Garbarek—is quite sublime: plenty of us would happily have sat through another half hour along those lines. ♦

## Coming soon to Acropolis:

- *Matt and Mara* (Dir. Kazik Radwanski, 2024)—October 10 at 2220 Arts + Archives, with Kazik Radwanski and actress Deragh Campbell in person
- *Time of the Seasons: Two Films by Vadim Kostrov* (*Summer and Fall*, 2021/2022)—October 16 at 2220 Arts + Archives, with Vadim Kostrov in person
- *Directors’ Fortnight 2024: Los Angeles*—November 1-3 at the Culver Theater, featuring seven films from this year’s Quinzaine des cinéastes in Cannes



September 29, 2024 - 2220 Arts + Archives

# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

A short story by Haruki Murakami published in 2013 and made into a film by Ryūsuke Hamaguchi, with an original soundtrack by composer Eiko Ishibashi. Tonight's event will feature Ishibashi performing selections from her Oscar-nominated score, which Pitchfork has called "glorious and entrancing... as moving as the film itself." *Co-presented by the Yanai Initiative for Globalizing Japanese Humanities.*

TRT: 60 min

In person: Eiko Ishibashi

## Drive My Car: Original Soundtrack by Andrew Ryce

*The following is an article originally published by Resident Advisor, March 2, 2022*

The first sound in Ryusuke Hamaguchi's Oscar-nominated film *Drive My Car* is the mere suggestion of strings, like an echo divorced of its source material. The melody it plays out is vaguely sad, but more than anything, it's ambiguous—tentative, perplexed. This is the music of Eiko Ishibashi, a Japanese composer and sound artist whose work is largely (electro)acoustic but approaches mixing and the soundstage like an electronic music producer would. Her score for *Drive My Car* is one the film's most arresting aspects. Its twin themes seem to breathe and exhale along with the wrenching, slow-moving plot, morphing to suit new moods and new characters as they appear. It's a great film soundtrack, and it also makes for an unusually good album, as Ishibashi's beautifully recorded compositions come together in new configurations each time.

The film, in as brief terms as possible, follows a bereaved Japanese playwright who takes a residency in Hiroshima, following his intense and often frustrating personal relationships. I'm not here to discuss or spoil the film for you, but it helps to understand the soundtracks motivation, whose emotional ambiguity is one of Ishibashi's greatest strengths. *Drive My Car*'s main theme is based on piano, drums and strings (performed by a band that includes Jim O'Rourke). It lays out all basic ingredients for Ishibashi's score, including an electric piano whose tremolo effect is the aural equivalent of watering eyes, strings that swoop in for a hint of feeling without a trace of sentimentality.

She can write melodies that wrench with feeling, but exactly *what* feeling that might be is left to the listener to decide. For those who have seen the film, the character-specific themes are wonderful: the hired driver Misaki's version mirrors the smooth, professional clip of her driving, while the main character Kafuku's theme is a tortured inversion of the original, with a sense of distant but intense yearning. Ishibashi's arpeggiated piano figures are incredible here—stately yet stuck in a circular rut.

The drums, jazzy and pacy, also command your attention. They imitate the film's curious dramatization of commuting—the regularity of driving to and from work, following the speck of a car moving along a beautiful landscape. Ishibashi says she based all her music for the film around one rhythm, and the soundtrack comes back to it again and again,

sometimes slow and wounded, other times brisk.

The other main theme is the one you hear at the beginning of the film—"We'll Live Through The Long, Long Days, And Through The Long Nights." More focused on strings, this one features fantastic interplay between piano and bass, though each successive version feels a little more skeletal, almost like the decay of a Caretaker album. This composition has the most variation, from the windswept Spaghetti Western twang of "And When Our Last Hour Comes We'll Go Quietly" to the sprightly, almost hopeful closing track "Different Ways."

Along with the exquisitely recorded instruments, the compositions are fortified with field recordings, some presumably made by Ishibashi herself and others featuring sounds from the film added by the producers. You can hear the click of a cassette deck, the ambiance of traffic, the beeping of a car's door ajar alarm, all of which suffuse the music with a warm, familiar air. The most arresting moments happen in tracks like "Saab 900" and "Hiroshima," including jarring car horn streaking across the stereo spectrum as if narrowly avoiding accident. These touches are so lifelike that they makes you feel like you're in that reliable old Saab yourself, mulling over the meaning of life and purpose along with the characters.

In that same interview with *Tone Madison*, Ishibashi said, "I don't consider the *Drive My Car* soundtrack to be my own work." That's something of a harsh assessment—and I don't agree—but it also underlines her own commitment to the film, and the music's almost alchemical quality. Listening to the soundtrack on its own is to experience Ishibashi's electroacoustic magic, but listening to it in the film it becomes part of the fabric of the visuals, as important as dialogue or any establishing shot. This is the true genius of Ishibashi's score, which just happens to work well as an album, too. Like the film it soundtracks, *Drive My Car* explores the deepest, most complex and often subtle shades of human emotion, presenting similar scenes and themes with just small tweaks, or new, heavier feeling each time.

## Eiko Ishibashi Performs the Music of *Drive My Car* by John Lewis

*The following is an article originally published by The Guardian, November 21, 2022*

Eiko Ishibashi is a composer and multi-instrumentalist who wears many hats. Over the last decade and a half we've heard her recording left-field music with such avant-rock luminaries as Jim O'Rourke and Keiji Haino; making ear-grating prog-punk with Tatsuya Yoshida from Ruins; crooning low-volume ambient ballads on the album *Carapace*; singing over angular jazz-rock on *Car and Freezer*; experimenting with musique concrète and electronica on *Satellite*; and recording Nils Frahm-ish piano solos on *I'm Armed*. And that's just a small selection of her output.

Tonight she wears yet another hat: that of the film composer, playing an hour-long suite of songs based on her soundtrack to the multiple-Oscar-nominated, Palme d'Or-winning movie *Drive My Car*. Each composition is turned into a duet between herself and the alto saxophonist Kei Matsumaru. It's an interesting twist, given that there aren't any saxophones on the original soundtrack, but Matsumaru has a soft, sighing, vibratoless delivery that often sounds like a flute, or even a string section, which fits many of these tracks.